

FMT

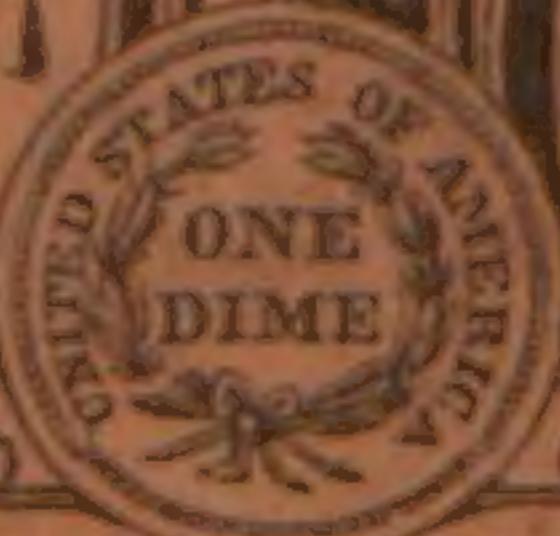
[28 Pages.]

Published Semi-Monthly.

[Complete.]

BEADLE'S

DIME NOVELS



No. 23.

The Choicest Works of the Most Popular Authors.

WINIFRED WINTHROP;

OR, THE

LADY OF AHERTON HALL.

A PRIZE STORY.

New-York and London:

BEADLE AND COMPANY, 141 WILLIAM ST. N. Y.

Hamilton, Johnson & Farrelly, 22 Ann St.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the Year 1861,
by BEADLE AND COMPANY, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United
States for the Southern District of New York.

Books for the Hour!

Beadle's Dime Songs for the War!

Star Spangled Banner, Yankee Doodle, Hail Columbia,
Marseilles Hymn, The Flag of Our Union, I Wish I Was In Dixie,
The Sword of Bunker Hill, Our Flag is There, Red, White and Blue,
Our Union, Right or Wrong, My Country, 'Tis of Thee, Etc., Etc., Etc.

Beadle's Dime Squad Drill-Book;

OR, SCHOOL O' THE SOLDIER. A Simple Guide to Infantry Recruit
Drill and the Rifle Exercise. For the use of the Minute Man, the Recruit,
the Home Guard, and Citizen Soldiers generally.

MILITARY EXPLOITS

OF GREAT

SOLDIERS AND GENERALS.

BEADLE'S

Dime Biographical Library.

EACH ISSUE COMPLETE. 100 PAGES. PRICE TEN CENTS.

No. 6.—THE LIFE, MILITARY AND CIVIC SERVICES OF LIEUT.-GEN.
WINFIELD SCOTT. Complete up to the present period.

No. 4.—THE LIFE, TIMES AND SERVICES OF ANTHONY WAYNE
(MAD ANTHONY): Brigadier-General in the War of the Revolution, and
Commander-in-Chief of the Army during the Indian War.

No. 1.—THE LIFE OF JOSEPH GARIBALDI: The Liberator
of Italy. Complete up to the withdrawal of Garibaldi to his Island
Home, after the Neapolitan Campaign, 1860.

These brilliant books of the most brilliant Commanders and
Soldiers of modern times possess remarkable interest at this moment.
Each book will be found to be a *full* record of the men and events in
which they acted so splendid a part.

EVERY YOUNG MAN SHOULD READ THEM!

EVERY SOLDIER SHOULD READ THEM!

EVERY LOVER OF THE UNION SHOULD READ THEM!

For Sale by all News Dealers.

WINIFRED WINTHROP;

OR, THE

LADY OF ATHERTON HALL.

BY CLARA AUGUSTA.

NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,
141 WILLIAM ST., CORNER OF FULTON.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the Year 1860, by
B E A D L E A N D C O M P A N Y,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Southern District of New York.

CLARK, BROWNE, AND COMPANY, BOSTON.
NEW YORK: D. APPLEYARD & CO.

WINIFRED WINTHROP; OR, THE LADY OF AHERTON HALL.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUSPECTED CLERK.

"The dignity of truth is lost
With much protesting." BEN JONSON.

AHERTON HALL crowned a green eminence, a score of rods from the broad sweep of the Charles river; and from its windows the eye ranged over a delightful variety of scenery, hill and valley, forest and meadow land; while a couple of miles to the east, Charlestown monument lifted up its granite finger against the sky; and in a long, continuous line the spires of Boston glittered in the sunlight. The distant horizon met the sea; the sea so darkly blue, that but for the sails which dotted, here and there, its calm bosom, you would have thought an azure cloud had descended, to rest for a season upon the earth.

At the hall door, a carriage was waiting on this fair June of which we write—a sumptuous carriage, with two gray horses, and a liveried driver. Miss Winifred Atherton, the lady of Atherton Hall, pleased to take an airing.

She came down the broad steps at last: this lagging Winifred, leaning on the arm of her father. The young lady—she had not seen more than fifteen summers—was a beautiful picture to look upon. Father and daughter were all in all to each other—the last of a noble family. The wife and mother had slept for years in the bosom of a green grave at Auburn; the blue-eyed babe of six years was nestled to her side—the only son and brother had died at sea, and been laid to rest by rough but kindly hands in the great deep.

Robert Atherton's vast wealth would go to this daughter of his. No wonder the little lady could afford to be scornful; no wonder she walked the ground like a very queen; she had been ruler at Atherton Hall so long that a spirit of command had become with her second nature.

The pair were whirled rapidly toward Boston. Mr. Atherton to his place of business, on Broad-street; Miss Winifred to spend the day with Mrs. Marchmont, on Beacon-street.

The carriage was nearly opposite the police-office, when it suddenly came to a halt, its further progress impeded by a crowd about the door of the tribunal.

Winifred contented herself with tapping the velvet carpet for awhile with her dainty foot, then she grew impatient, and spoke. . .

"What is the cause of this delay?"

"Some trial of interest, going on here, I should conclude, from the number of curious ones assembled," returned Mr. Atherton.

"Well, then, if we are to remain here, I see not why we should miss of gratifying our curiosity by witnessing the remarkable performance. I am going in to see for myself. It will be something entirely novel for me."

"My daughter! Winifred Atherton! you go into a police-court! What can you be thinking of?"

"You are brow-stricken, papa, but you will go in with me, I know."

Her hand pressed his arm; those eyes, so like her dead mother's, looked into his. He never could resist Winnifred when in that mood.

"It is *very* foolish in you, my dear, to wish to mix with yonder vulgar crowd."

He alighted from the carriage, and handed Winifred out. The interest of the court-room was turned from the prisoner to center around the millionaire and his daughter. The scene within the office was by no means an uncommon one in a large city. A young man of about sixteen was arraigned to be tried for forgery. The circumstances, as evolved by the evidence, were briefly these:

Gerard Middleton had been under-clerk in the wholesale dry-goods establishment of Chambers & Marshall. He had

enjoyed the confidence of his employers for two years; and his prompt attention to business had won the esteem of all connected with the store, except, perhaps, that of Charles Cooper, the accountant, between whom and young Middleton there had ever existed one of those mutual antipathies for which we often find it so difficult to assign a reason.

A fortnight previously, the name of the firm had been forged to a paper of importance—a draft upon the Blackstone Bank for nine hundred dollars. The check was presented by Gerard, thrown out as ungenuine by the paying teller, and the clerk was detained on a charge of forgery.

The culprit stood before his judges, pale but composed; handsome he certainly was; and his bearing was quite as haughty as though he counted his money by the thousand dollars, instead of lacking a solitary copper. His defense was, simply, *innocence*. He had no knowledge of the check until it came, duly signed, into his hands; he was perfectly and entirely innocent. When did ever a statement of this kind, coming from one accused, have any weight? His employers looked upon it as a hardened evasion of the truth, and Middleton was about to be carried to prison in default of bail for fifteen hundred dollars.

Winifred's quick apprehension caught the facts of the case instantly; her heart responded sympathizingly to the look of desperate despair on the youth's face. She pressed her father's arm to secure his attention.

"Will you bail this Gerard Middleton, papa?"

"No, indeed! The saints forbid!" cried Mr. Atherton, in righteous indignation.

"Then I must do it instead!" said Winnifred, with determination, and moving to the side of the magistrate, she spoke a few words in his ear. The good man started, frowned, and then smiled:

"My dear young lady, it is without precedent—this proposal of yours. It is not common for young girls to offer bail for reckless characters like this Middleton."

"Granted. Nor yet were deluges common, but one occurred, nevertheless, in the time of Noah."

"If Miss Atherton is serious, and her father consents, no more can be said. Mr. Atherton, sir, we await your decision."

"Winifred may have her way. She is all I have to indulge, and she has taken a fancy to see the lad released. I will give bonds for him myself," returned Mr. Atherton, with much good humor; and directly the necessary papers being drawn up and signed, Gerard Middleton was pronounced at liberty.

He advanced to the side of Miss Atherton, and held out his hand. She put her jeweled fingers into his clasp. No word was uttered, but the dark brilliant eyes of the youth spoke most eloquently his gratitude. For a moment he looked into her face—then with a slight bend of his fine figure to the people in the court-room, he passed out.

"Well, daughter," said Mr. Atherton, when they were once more seated in the carriage, "you have liberated the young scamp; what do you propose to do with him?"

"Do with him? Why, you will take him into the store, of course."

"There is not a single vacant place in the whole concern, and if there were a hundred, I would not admit one like him."

"If there is no vacancy, you must create a new place to be filled. A place for this Gerard Middleton's special benefit."

"Not to save his head!"

"Very well. Then I will find a situation for him."

"Eh! what?"

"Fall in love with his handsome face, and invite him to elope with me, if nothing more favorable offers. Our names would sound finely together, in the *Morning Herald*."

"Winifred Atherton, you will be in a lunatic asylum yet! Elope with him indeed! Elope with a rascally clerk!"

"I shall be obliged to do so, father, unless you can put him in some place where he can earn his living; for, you see, a clerk has to eat, and drink, and wear coats like other men."

Mr. Atherton winced; he was used to this matter-of-fact dealing from his girl, and yet he did not like it.

"Perhaps I can get him into Porter's grocery as errand boy. Too good for him, I dare say."

"And I will not permit him to go there to be ordered about by cross husbands and sour old maids, buying half a pound of sugar, and two ounces of tea. Recollect, Mr. Gerard is my property now."

"Well, well, I will see about it. Perhaps Dalton can let him into his department to assist in the job work."

"Nothing of the kind, dear papa. I veto that plan entirely. This boy has a proud spirit, or I have failed to read his face aright. He shall not be humbled in that way. It would make him reckless; perhaps, lead him to crime. Show him that you have confidence in his integrity, and he will die rather than forfeit your good opinion. He must be nothing less than a clerk!"

"Winifred, what a famous little autocrat you would make for the Russians. Every man's head in the empire would be struck off in a week, who refused to swear fullest allegiance to your madcap plots."

"Dear sir, you flatter me. Shall my despotic ladyship be indulged, and thus Gerard become the respected incumbent of a respectable and lucrative situation in the hardware establishment of Robert Atherton & Co.?"

"Yes, yes; I will hunt him up if only to rid myself of your teasing. He will be a drawback upon me, no doubt; forge my name, or steal my bank-notes, but he shall have some situation with me, if it be only to stand by my elbow and wipe my pens."

"Very good. You are philanthropic, father mine, for which I kiss your cheek; and here we are!"

The coach drew up before a splendid stone mansion. In a few moments Winifred and pretty little Mrs. Marchmont were exchanging their delighted greetings in the shaded drawing-room; while Mr. Atherton, both vexed and amused with this new *penchant* of his daughter's, was borne rapidly down to his warehouses on Broad-street.

CHAPTER II.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

"But the suns will shine, and the rains will fall,
On the loftiest, lowliest spot;
And there's mourning and merriment mingled for all
That inherit the human lot."

GERALD MASSEY.

MR. ATHERTON was as good as his word. Gerard Middleton was sought, found, and installed as assistant-correspondent in the counting-room of the wealthy merchant.

Young Middleton's history, previous to this time, was that of many another of his class. His father had been a poor but talented artist, who, dying young, left his widow and their child, Gerard, in a state of painful indigence. Mrs. Middleton came from a wealthy, as well as haughty family, and, having been disowned and cast off by these relatives, for wedding the man of her choice, she had too much of her kindred's stern pride, now, in her destitution to call upon them for assistance.

For three years she worked uninterruptedly for the tailor's shops in Boston, receiving in payment barely sufficient to keep soul and body together. The incessant toil and anxiety so wrought upon her slender frame that she was brought to a bed of sickness, from which she never arose. The kind physician—poor like herself—who, out of the Christian benevolence of his heart, visited her, said that only healthful food and country air could restore her. As well might he have prescribed the melted pearls of Cleopatra, or the powder of the Koh-i-noor diamond. For days the meager room where she dwelt was without fire—and night after night the darling boy went to his rude bed fasting, because there was no bread!

Mrs. Middleton's powers of life wasted away, and with hands meekly folded upon her breast, she committed herself to the care of the God whom she was not afraid to trust. He, seeing how weary of earth was her spirit, severed the silver thread, and rent in twain the golden bowl. Gerard Middleton

was crushed by the words of the physician, who had remained until the last:—"You are motherless."

The boy was ten years old; bright, active, and intelligent—and yet he was carried to the workhouse. There were privileges of learning there—and there he improved to the utmost. When thirteen, he was taken into the office of a legal gentleman as copyist. Here he remained a year or more, when his superior penmanship attracted the attention of Mr. Chambers, senior member of a dry goods' firm, and after a little settlement of preliminaries, Gerard was domiciled with his new employers.

His only friend, during all this time, was Ruth Mowbray—a pauper, as he, himself, had been. Both of Ruth's parents had died in coming to this country from England; and their daughter had been consigned, by the captain of the vessel, to the home of the poor, immediately on their arrival in port.

Ruth was two years Gerard's junior; a beautiful fair-haired, blue-eyed girl; untainted by the associations which had of late surrounded her, and pure in heart as the white water-lily.

The boy and the girl had continual like brother and sister: and as soon as Gerard was able to earn something, he insisted on sharing his pittance with her. Through his influence with Mr. Chambers, Ruth was received into the millinery store of Madame De Lancer, on Washington-street, as an apprentice; where her engaging manners, and lovely face, attracted many a customer to her employer's counter.

Gerard Millerton had been but a few days in his new situation, when Mr. Atherton invited him to ride out to the Hall, and pass the night. It was not exactly a cordial invitation, for the rich merchant had many doubts regarding his clerk.

But it was Winifred's expressed pleasure to see the supposed master, and her father could deny her nothing with the shadow of reason about it.

Millerton was received, by the young mistress of the Hall, with much kindness; and after tea, she set herself to work at scolding theattendant's and qualifications of her guest. Winifred was a close questioner, and Millerton was obliged to confess that he knew no language save his own, and that rather imperfectly; that he could not sing, play, or dance, nor in the dance.

"Very well," said Winifred, composedly—"I will teach you Latin and French. Sometime when I go into business for myself, I am going to make you my foreman, and then the tongues of other nations will be of benefit to you."

"The Latin, in particular," observed Mr. Atherton.

"To be sure, if he should be engaged in purchasing medicines, as I suppose he will; for you know, Papa, I have serious thoughts of becoming a female physician."

"A female fiddlestick!" retorted Mr. Atherton, indignantly.

Winifred was used to this mood of her father's, so it did not trouble her in this instance, and she made an arrangement to commence her lessons on the following evening. Mr. Atherton would bring the pupil up in his carriage, at night, and take him back in the morning, she said; and Mr. Atherton was obliged to nod assentingly.

And thus it happened that General Middleton came daily within the influence of this proud, but warmly-kept girl. And during the quiet seasons at her side, he learned to know the meaning of every curl of her red lip, every toss of her crimsonly Lead; he learned to fear offending her, to live to gain her approbation; to look upon her as upon the evening star, so gorgeously beautiful, yet so very far above his reach.

During six months this quiet continued, and then the day appointed for his appearance at court drew nigh. General Middleton restless and uneasy; he feared condemnation, and that it would shut him away from his star, than that of his own disgrace and humiliation.

It was the evening previous to the day on which his guilt or innocence was to be established. General sat by the side of Winifred, repeating his task, when a note was handed to him and placed before him. He broke it open, ran his eye rapidly over the contents, while a flush of joy mounted to his pale cheek. He gave it to Winifred—the real hand:

"MR. GERARD MIDDLETON:—I am a thief of the first class in Europe. I am purposing to confess to Miss Churchill & Mrs. Marshall the guilt which I now confess to you. I fired the bullet upon the Blackstone Bank, and can only return it to you, because I hated you. I hated you because of Ruth, and the pretty scampish Ruth Morley, and you and I, and

ing me some bad names that it is useless to repeat. I wanted to be revenged on you, but, as I am rather a good fellow, I am willing to be generous, especially as I can afford it, having recently fallen heir to a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds, waiting for me in merry old England. I run no risk in exonerating you; as, with my poverty, I renounce forever the plebeian name of

CHARLES COOPER."

There was a light of triumph in Winifred's eyes as she finished reading.

"Well, father, what do you think now of my discernment?"

"It seems you were right, Winnie; and I beg Millerton's pardon for distrusting him; but let us have no scenes. Go on with your conjugations."

All through the winter and early spring, Winifred devoted herself to her self-imposed task of teaching her father's clerk, and the most sunshiny teacher must have been astonished at the progress made by the scholar. Gerard's intellect was quick and vigorous; and he learnt at all sources of knowledge with avidity—just such an avidity as was pleasing to the exacting nature of Miss Atherton.

Late in May came Winifred's sixteenth birthday, and the quiet of the hall was entirely broken up. On the evening which made her sixteen, the "dress" was to be presented to society—brought out in a grand reception-hall. Preparations for this great event went rapidly forward, and Mr. Eustace's visits were interrupted. Presents from abroad had now begun to arrive in the young beauty, in lavish profusion; diamonds and pearls sparkled, and in full bloom in her dress-case; and the most costly flannels perfumed the apartment above of the wide drawing-room.

Winifred had pressed Gerard to keep quiet at the reception—he had done so with a gruff laugh, which did not escape the eye of the pretty heir. An entreatment, however, would prevent him from exposing the pleasure Miss Atherton so kindly offered him. Winifred was the first to fly; but she only said—very well, Mr. Millerton was at liberty to do as he chose.

Gerard did not tell her that this arrangement was due to

Chelsea with Ruth Mowbray—could he indefinitely postpone it as well; he did not tell her that his only reason for desiring to be present at the *fête*, was because he had not, in the wide world, money enough to purchase a suit of dress-fabric to wear to such an aristocratic assembly.

Just before the hour set apart for the arrival of the guests, while Winifred was yet at her toilet, a simple cluster of wild arbutus flowers, fresh and sweet in their pink perfume, came to her, with the name of Gerard Middleton written on a slip of paper which entwined the slender stems.

Those pure flowers found a resting-place in the silken richness of her hair that night, but Gerard was not there to witness the effect, and none knew the secret, but himself the giver.

Winifred Atherton was flatly rebuked by all she met. She could not have wished for a daintier cluster of blossoms than that which hung around her whenever she moved. People bowed low before her—troupe hearts beat quick at her smile, and in all that crowd of youth and beauty there was none to compare with Winifred. She sang—her voice was rich and sweet and powerful; and she played with the grace of a Thalberg. She conversed—her lively wit, her wit, and versatility astounded and charmed her listeners.

Miss Winthrop, the wealthy, independent, and brilliant heiress, for once, acknowledged all the power of beauty. It was twice Winifred's age; a tall, grave, stately woman, with an unfeigned good opinion of herself. Roger was very willing that there were circumstances connected with this young man that, if known, would confirm his opinion of him; but he was rich and powerful—and no one could remember old, half-forgotten memories.

Through the sun of gayety which shone upon the day-party, she was the queen of every assembly, the central point about which a train of admiring persons revolved. But in spite of all this honor, she grew older and older, and her looks—albion called her The Heart of Iron—did not improve for it. And in that nice annual letter, which came to her in the frosty mail,

Gerard Middleton never came to the house, nor did Winifred

saw him only at rare intervals, when she called with some gay party, at her father's store, to assist in selecting bronzes and costly candelabras for some newly-wedded friend. At such times he never greeted her, unless she first addressed him. He never lifted his face to hers, though the crimson deepened on his cheek, and the pen he held moved unsteadily over the paper. There was little of the ear about this proud clerk; he would not fawn about the hand that might, the next moment, thrust him away.

Toward the close of October, a party was made up for an excursion to Mt. Holyoke, and a week's sojourn in its romantic vicinity. Mr. Winthrop was to accompany Miss Atherton; Mr. and Mrs. Marchmont and other friends were to be of the party.

It was a cloudless morning when they set forth—all anticipating a merry time, and all in good spirits. Winifred saw, with some surprise, that Gerard Middleton occupied a seat near her, and she spoke of it to Mr. Winthrop, who said that Mr. Atherton had sent the clerk out to Springfield on business connected with his trade.

The train proceeded steadily and safely; every wheel performed its duty. They reached a long bridge built over an arm of the Connecticut river. There was a momentary trembling of the timbers, as the engine ploughed over them—then Winifred heard a dull, dead crash—she was sensible of nothing more, until Mr. Middleton, snatching her up in his arms, dashed with her out upon the platform. Not a moment's pause did he make to reply to her intelligent speech of resistance, but with one athletic bound, he cleared the tottering platform, and leaped with his burden into the water!

Bearing her up with one arm, he struck out for the shore with the other, and in a few moments Winifred, cold and dripping, stood upon the firm sand. Her cheeks burned crimson, and her eyes flashed merrily as she confronted the young man.

"Sir, what means this insult?"

He raised his hand and pointed in the direction of the train they had just quit.

"Look and see!" he said, calmly.

She did look, and all the pride and scorn went out of her

face. The cheeks grew white—the eyes lost their angry brilliancy. She put her hand in his for support and sympathy. His fingers closed over hers, but neither spoke while they gazed together upon the sad scene.

The bridge, its massive timbers broken in the center, lay tossing about in the swift current of the river; the mighty engine had half buried its shattered body in the hard gravel on the opposite side; and the cars, in one crushed, confused mass, were piled up against the abutment of the bridge.

The unfortunate passengers, such of them as were left alive, were making their egress from broken windows and rent doors—some with faces pale and bloody, others uninjured.

Of the latter class was Mr. Winthrop; who, without delay, hastened to the side of Miss Atherton to offer his congratulations on her escape. He thanked Mr. Millerton coldly for the service he had done the lady, and drawing her hand within his arm, led her away to the nearest dwelling.

Millerton bowed haughtily to this coldly expressive gratitude, and turned his back upon the speaker. What did he care for the scorn of the rich man, so long as the sweet face of Winifred had pressed his?—and her eyes looked, wet with tears, into his face! He knew she was not all he.

When Mr. Atherton heard of the conduct of Mr. Millerton, he was filled with admiration and gratitude, and thanked the young man in a torrent of enthusiasm wrung from the depths of his parental love.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT BRIDAL.

"Mine after life! What is mine after life?
My day is closed. The gloom of night comes on—
A hopeless darkness settles o'er my fate."

JOANNA BAILEY.

Of course, the excursion to Holyoke was broken up; three of the pleasure-seekers were among the dead; and several were severely wounded.

For a time, the shadow of this melancholy accident damped the spirit of gayety in the circles where the dead unfortunate had moved; but ere long the occurrence was forgotten.

Balls, soirees, and masquerades followed each other in rapid succession. At each bright assembly Winifred Atherton shone pre-eminent. Mr. Winthrop was still her constant cavalier. She would look splendidly at the head of the table, she would do the honors of his house right royally; she had a fine figure for displaying the costly fabrics in which he should be proud to see his wife dressed; in his heart he fatehered her to become Mrs. Winthrop, the mistress of Maplewood.

Valentine's Eve arrived, cold and frosty—and on this evening Mrs. Marchmont was to give a grand ball. Of course Miss Atherton was expected to be present, & belle, & friend.

Winifred stood before the tall mirror, in her dressing-room, that wintry afternoon, and watched the effect of the crimson velvet robe, in which the nimble fingers of her maid were arraying her. There were gleaming rubies on her arms and armband her throat; precious gems which had just been brought in—bearing on their richly chased clasps the simple inscription—

"To Winifred, from her father."

The eye of the brilliant beauty fell on the gay glitter of

the jewels; she bowed down her head, and kissed the bracelet which clasped her snowy wrist—moaning sadly—

"Dear papa! how kind and tender he is! How could I live without his love?"

The maid finished the exquisite collar; the last end was arranged, the last fold of lace in its place; and Winifred, with a book in her hand, sat down to await the coming of her father. Time passed swiftly; the heavy clock on the chimney struck out another hour, and still Mr. Atherton did not appear.

The lady grew impatient. Mrs. Mardon would be offended if she were late at the Hall. She rose at last, and turned to go down-stairs.

"Tell my father, when he comes, that I waited a full hour for him to see my dress, and—good heavens! what means this confusion below?"

She flew down the stairs at a bound. The hall was thronged with men, wearing pale and sombre countenances. She would have rushed through the crowd to the door, whither some shroud-like object was being borne, but a strong arm held her back, and drew her into a side room. The door was closed, and the man placed his back against it, thus preventing her attempted escape.

She lifted her face imploringly to him.

"What is it, Gerard Millington? Has anything happened to my father?"

Gerard was very pale, but his voice was calm and even. He took in his own the hand she had unconsciously laid on his arm.

"Be composed, Miss Atherton. You have nothing to fear; it to your aid."

"Fortitude! oh yes; I can bear any thing! Only tell me the worst! Suspense will kill me! Is my father dead?"

"No; thank God, he is not dead!"

"But he is dying! I read it in your face! Out of my way, this moment, sir! I will go to him! My place is at his side!"

"The surgeon is examining his patient. You must wait."

"Wait! I can not wait! Wait! and my father—the only one I have a right to live—lying! Again I ask you, tell me the worst."

"Sit down then; your fearful looks make me tremble for your reason. Your father was passing along Water-street an hour ago,—they are taking down some old buildings there,—and a falling timber struck him on the forehead. He was raised up senseless, and by the physician's orders we have brought him home."

"Do they say he will die senseless? Will he never be able to speak again?"

"Miss Atherton, your very calmness terrifies me. Have you no tears to shed? no groans to utter?"

"Tears! will they bring my father back to health? Tears are a mockery. Tell me if he will speak to me again—before the eternal silence comes?"

"In all probability, yes. When his shocked system shall recover from this stupor."

"You would tell me that pain will restore him?"

"Perhaps so."

"Well, then, so be it. Mr. Mibbleton, look at me. Am I not composed and serene? Do you see any manifestation of emotion and spasm of suffering?"

"I see a stone statue!"

"Very good. Statues do not feel. Therefore take me to my father."

He led the way, she followed; and the two passed on to the couch of the wounded man. Mr. Atherton lay upon a bed which had been hastily arranged in the center of the room; his eyes were closed, and his brow bound with a white cloth.

Winifred approached and touched his cheek with her hand. The motion roused him; he opened his eyes and spoke—

"Winifred, my daughter, is it you?"

"It is I, rather."

"You are calm; thank heaven for that! you are calm, and yet you are very pale, Winifred!"

"Yes, I am composed—I might a little pale, but that is nothing. My heart beats steadily—my limbs don't tremble?"

"No. And for this I rejoice. I had feared otherwise. My child, your father is dying; you will soon be a widow again—and alone, and without kin left."

A sharp sound struck her name—the male voice of her

face was troubled, but she recovered herself almost immediately.

"I am going to leave you, Winifred; and before I go, you must be provided with a legal protector. You are too young and beautiful to be left without a guardian."

"Well, father."

"My daughter, I am about to require of you an act of instant obedience to a wish I have never before expressed in your hearing. Within this room, before the end of another hour, you must become the wife of Mr. F. Whithrop."

Winifred staggered back like one stricken by a rifle-ball; her face would be no whiter when the grave is pressed down upon it.

"God forbid!" she ejaculated, in horrified accents.

"It is as I had expected. You are shocked at such unseemly haste. You think, perhaps, that Mr. Whithrop will share in that feeling. Let me assure you that you are mistaken. Months ago, he asked of me my daughter's hand, and I told him he must wait until you had time to love him. In this man I have full confidence; I would trust him with my life—I am not afraid to confide to him my dearest treasure—my Winifred. Knowing that you are his wife, I can be content; the grave will have no thorns for me. This is no senseless chimera of a fevered brain; it is the firmly-entrenched resolve of one, who, as a dying man, thinks all things are clearly the nearer he approaches that country where we shall see no more through a glass darkly."

The sufferer paused to regain strength. Winifred sprang up resolutely.

"Ask any thing but that, my father! Rouse up now, and it shall be given up to you! But this thing I cannot do."

"You *must* do it, Winifred Atherton! There is no room for a single doubt on that point. Is your father, or am I mad? By your fears of my dying ears, dare to deny me!"

"I *must* dare it, father! I would buy the power of the infernal regions, rather than picture myself in that state!"

Mr. Atherton fell back; a terrible change had taken his face. A deadly pallor settled on his lips—his eyes were dim and glassy. Winifred sprang forward and clasped him close to her bosom.

"Speak to me once more, father! Bless me—your little Winifred—before you go!"

He turned his face away from her, and moaned out, feebly—

"Little did I think my own girl would inflict this grief on her old father! Little did I think that my death-hour would be embittered by that child's disobedience! The few brief moments I have to live must be cut short; my death hastened by the wilfulness of my only daughter!"

His words cut her to the heart. She fell on her knees by the bedside, and cried brokenly—

"Do with me as you will! I can not listen to such reproaches as these, and live!"

Mr. Atherton's face brightened; with one feeble arm he drew her head down on his bosom, and kissed her icy lips.

"God in heaven bless my daughter! She will make her father's death-bed a couch of ease!"

Mr. Whistler came forward from the window where he had been standing, and took the cold, passive hand of the girl in his. At a sign from Mr. Atherton, a gray-haired, mild-faced old man advanced, and stood up before the waiting trio.

Gerald Millington, pale, and unaccountably agitated, rose to leave the apartment.

A look from Winifred stopped him. She went over to his side, and said—

"Stay with me, Gerald. Stay and see me changed to stone. So merry and glad a wedding should not lack a groomsman."

And Gerald closed the door behind him, and came back to the bedside.

It was a sad and solemn ceremony. The bride in her robes of crimson; her face whiter than the lily on her bosom; her lips cold and pale; her eyes brilliant and hard as diamonds. The bridegroom, self-satisfied, haughty, and triumphant; the dying man propped up on his pillows to look at the strange sacrifice.

The words were still; the responses uttered in the clear voice of the girl, and the other, as shrill tones of the man; the lips of the drowsy Whistler touched the brow of his wife—and the fervent sigh of the expiring man was pronounced in a full voice, upon the newly wedded pair.

The great clock on the hall struck full forth twelve strokes; the wintry winds rose to a fierce blast in the towered elm-trees; and through the lonely aisle s and corridors of the hall the wind-voices sighed and moaned like tombs' spirits.

And out into the night and darkness—out upon the unknown sea, whose waves wash the shores of eternity, went the soul of Robert Atherton, to meet its Judge; while stark and motionless lay the earthly part, shrouded for the coffin rest.

During the three days preceding the funeral, while the remains of Mr. Atherton lay in state, Winifred Whistler wandered about the darkened rooms, pale and stern as a Nun. Not a feature of her frozen face suffered; not a tear dimmed the brilliancy of her glittering eye.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, was the body of her father committed. In a carriage covered with black plumes, and drawn by sable horses, she followed it to Mount Auburn; she went down to the very door of the tomb, and saw the coffin laid by that of her mother; she turned away as the iron gate swung inward, and shut that below it from forever from her sight—not a trace of emotion disturbed the marble immobility of her countenance.

Why should she weep and weary heaven with vain prayers? Was not her misfortune fatal?

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEVERING.

"Drip! drip, oh, rain!
 From the sky beclouded leaves!
 Wail! wail, oh wind,
 That sweepest the wither'd leaves!
 Sigh! sigh, oh, heart—
 That vainly seekest rest!
 Mourn! mourn, oh, heart,
 By grief and care oppres'd!"

Hausehold Words.

One night more beneath the beloved roof of Atherton Hall—one night more of liberty—and then Winifred was to go forth from its hallowed shelter, to dwell in the stately mansion of her husband. Maplewood was a sea-side residence, a few miles above the ancient town of Plymouth, and so far away from Boston that Mr. Winthrop would not be at home more than twice a week, and for this Winifred felt great sol. The slavery she then left, would be more tolerable while the master was absent.

This last night in the halls of her childhood, she had determined; her mind was forbidden to intrude; and she asked of Mr. Winthrop, as a special favor, immunity from his society.

The night was bitter cold; the snow fell thickly from an angry sky, and the icy north wind whistled over the earth as though intent on an arm'd of destruction. For a couple of hours Winifred sat the Captain's room alone; at last she披ed herself in a shawl, and throwing open the curtains, looked out into the darkness. The fury of the storm filled her with a wild alarm. It was like the emotion in her own soul. She stood silent over her bed, and stepping into the cupboard, hurriedly took out her bonnet that the Captain was preparing for her.

Then she girded down the back stairs, under the great

bolts of the outer door softly, and emerged into the chill and gloom. The piercing wind made her shiver, but the freedom and freedom of its breath gave her a kind strength, and she went on down the lawn, her steps on the grass which her whiteness obstructed the pathway.

On and on, her hand pressed hard against her heart, she flew; she had reached the pine copse wood at the end of the meadow, and was losing herself in its depths of shadow, when an outstretched human arm stayed her progress. A voice, strangely familiar, said :

" Winifred! Winifred! where are you going?"

" Let me go! Let me go, Gerard Merton! I am in no mood for company!"

" You shall not go until I tell you of the misery of the dead and the heart-broken! of the terrible agony which another than yourself is enduring! Oh, why, why had I not been born a peer, or you a pauper?"

" It was not so decreed. And wherefore did thou say It could not have changed my fate?"

" Winifred, our stations in life are different; and though society separates us; but before God we are equal. As a friend, as an equal, I ask you do you like this man whom you have wedded?"

" Love him? It is degrading the body and soul to speak it in connection with his name."

" Winifred—I can not call you by your name—say no more. Deny me what you will, I must raise up from this crushing burden of doubt. Looking him over, do you like another?"

His face was close to hers; the dark eyes of the angel searched her countenance. She did not speak. The organ burst through its treble vail of cloud, and the organ notes fell down on the burning flesh with a sharp, shrill, agonized growl, and became of the tremulous girl. Her eyes closed.

" For this moment, Winifred, I am happy. In love with my beloved, why should I fear that a place in heaven."

" In being beloved?" she asked, tremulously. " Because the angel loved over the only one who loved her? Is not my poor thrush life to lead me along over land and water and almost less deserts?"

"None to love you! Would to Heaven, Winifred, that I could tear out my heart, and fling it at your feet, that, seeing all its agonized throbbing, you might be convinced!"

She comprehended him—he knew then how well and earnestly she had been loved; for a moment the earth swam before her, then all her woe and despair surged forth in two simple words:

"Too late!"

His arms opened to enfold her—they held her madly to his breast; his lips rained down passionate kisses upon her face.

"It might have been! O God!"

She tore herself away and stood erect—pale and cold as a chiseled statue.

"Gerald Middleton, I am a wife. My time of weakness is past; I am strong in the determination to do my duty! This love which might have created for us an earthly Paradise must, henceforth, make us strangers! To-night I bid you farewell forever!"

She laid out her hand. He bowed his forehead upon it and said:

"The decree is just! Farewell!"

The next instant Gerald Middleton stood alone; and through the snow and sleet a dark figure made its hasty way up the avenue to Atherton Hall.

In the gray of the morning there was a knock at the door of the tiny cottage which served Ruth Moultray both for a shop and dwelling-place. Ruth was mistress of her trade now and in full career, if in a humble way.

The old woman set the place under seal the door, and admitted Gerald Middleton. She gave him a low-backed armchair—the two were very dear to each other—and bade him sit by the cheerful little fire. She noticed his pale face and all the pale hair, but she was a true and faithful friend to him—therefore she forbore troubling with painful questions.

He gazed into the fire; she sipped dimly; both silent, yet both anxious. At length he bent up, and flung himself down on the chintz-covered lounge—the only article of luxury which the frugal room contained.

"Ruth," he said, impatiently, "put down that work, and come and sit here by my side. I have a confession to make."

She blushed, and her small hands trembled as she laid aside the garment on which she had been engaged. He drew her down on the lounge and retained the hand he had taken. She did not shrink from the touch; she rested herself in the perfect and child-like confidence she felt in him.

"You will call me presumptuous; you will say my punishment is just; but oh, Ruth, I am very miserable!"

The calm, blue eyes of the girl were fixed to his countenance with sympathy. She stroked back the bright hair from his temples with her soft fingers, saying simply:

"I am sorry, Gerard."

"Yes; I know you are, my child, and so I have come to you to pour out my distress. I am but a boy—ninth in years have but just passed over me, and yet I have all the strength and passion of manhood! I have awakened to the joy and sorrow of life—have known the keenness and full of existence—I have loved!"

She started, blushed; and then turned white as December snow.

"I have loved one as far above me as the stars are above the earth! A proud, beautiful, but tender-hearted girl! And for all her wealth and pride and beauty, she loved me in return!"

Ruth's disengaged hand slipped her father's; she did not look up as she said:

"Well?"

"She loved me, but by the command of her father—the dying father—she would a man whom she loathed! My love is black, but it is morning light compared with hers! Only think of it, Ruth; compelled to cling to her, and yet when she feels only aversion and hatred!"

"And you loved her, Gerard—you loved her simply and strongly as you will never love another! You will never leave her, and her only, as long as this world shall last!"

He marvelled at the singular brilliancy of those blue eyes; he wondered at the truth which made her cheeks pale and her eyes—bright, so dull of expression! Is it possible I did not see it not.

"Yes, Ruth, I loved her thus! No other woman will ever enter into her place in my heart; no other footstep will wake the echoes of that sealed chamber where her love is buried. Henceforth, I ignore the existence of Love; I live only for Fame and Fortune!"

His voice took a hard, stern tone as he proceeded, and his face looked cold and gray as hammered granite. Ruth, pale silent, leaned against the wainscot. He went up to her, alarmed by her still rigidity.

"What ails you, dear Ruth? Why do you stand there so like a frozen thing?"

"I am cold;" she drew near the fire. "It is a bitter morning!"

"Yes, truly; and your arms are bare. Let me wrap this shawl around you."

"Thank you; and now go on. I am listening."

"I have little more to add, except that I am going away—where I scarcely know; but I must flee from the place which kills her. I will not remain to tempt her and expose my own weakness. And now, Ruth, if, in after years, you shall hear men speak of Gerard Millerton as a cold, loveless being, you will remember that he once had a heart, but that a cruel fate took away its vitality and left it dead."

"Yes, I will remember."

"That is well. I must go now, Ruth, and God bless you. It may be a long, long time until I see you again. God, in heaven, bless and prosper you!"

He held her for a moment in his brotherly arms, kissed her cheek with affection, and went from the house.

And Ruth, staggering back to a seat, cried out in sharp surprise:

"Yes; he said it would be a long time ere we met again! and so it will! the length and darkness of the grave lies between them and now!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WAGES OF DESPAIR.

"The bleak wind of March
Made her tremble and shiver;—
But not the dark arch,
Or the black flowing river;
Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery
Swift to be hurled—:
Anywhere, anywhere,
Out of the world."

HOOD.

GROWING up to youth together, it was no surprise that Gerard Middleton and Ruth Morley should be truly endeared to each other. Both were orphans, both were poor. Ruth was struggling through the world to obtain a subsistence by manual labor. It was but natural, then, that their attachment should be strong, and their regard for each other deep and steadfast.

With Gerard this affection was that of a brother for a dear sister; with Ruth, it was the all-absorbing passion of life. She never thought of happiness save in Gerard's arms; never dreamed of a heaven from whence he was excluded.

Purely and entirely she loved him; her heart would have given, any day, to have saved him a place all his own, and joys were centered around him. She never failed to think of the consequences of this ardent love; she would have blushed with violet shame if it had been said to her, even in sport, "You love this Gerard Middleton?"

Yet in her true and loyal heart, she pulled up at the shrine of this earthly idol.

Fearfully had she been punished! The golden hours had vanished. The skies, lately so radiant, were gray and cold; earth stretched out before her a barren and desolate desert—there was no joy; no hope; no ray of comfort! Why should she stay to drag out a lonely existence? Why should

years? "Why should her hair be blanched white by the weight of years, and her eyes grow dim with age before the sleep of the grave—its sweet, dreamless sleep came upon her.

She had lost the courage to look the grim fatare in the face! The faith was small; her trust in God's gracious Providence weak. She said to herself she would go down to death, and thus rid her heart of its burden. There was rest in death.

There would be none to mourn for her; Gerard, perhaps, might shed a few tears, but they would dry soon, and her name would pass from his remembrance. One little plunge beneath the bosom of the sparkling river—a little chillness as the great change crept on—a wondering of strangers over the drawn bier—and all would be over!

The night set in dark with storm clouds. There was a dull, steady breeze blowing; the tempest of yesterday had spent its fury, but the skirts of its garments yet trail'd over the earth.

Ruth put her little room in order, trimmed the lamp, and lighted a fire in the chimney-place. You would have thought, from her scrupulous exactness, that a favored and welcome visitor was expected. When every thing was arranged, she pulled her shawl over her shoulders, and locking the door of the outer chamber, she took the path through the snow, to the river.

She stood upon the high bank above the falling flood—listened to the hollow murmur of the wind in the bare trees, and the low murmur, voices of the waters as they hurried past.

A mournful, trembling voice burst—cold hands and chattering at the warmth and life of bark—but she comprehended the emotion, for the grave was not colder than the world—the desolate, heartless world!

"I'll let her hands touch my naked flesh—*'Gloria receive me!'*"

The fatal spring was made—the earth crumbled down under her feet—the chill drift in the river swept up and made her shudder—but she did not fall. A strong hand held her back—a grave, solemn voice said:

"Child! what would you do?"

"I would die!" she said, simply.

"Didst thou then, call me? Do you dare to go unsummoned into the presence of the Ruler of Heaven and Earth—the Lord of Hosts, who has filled a man to day with the life which He has given?"

"I am weary and heart sick, good sir; and the tomb gives a dreamless sleep."

"But the hereafter! Have you thought of that? the terrible hereafter! You are young and fair; your face is like the face of a child, why should you be weary of that life which you have just begun; and which strong man braced by a thousand storms, clings to tenaciously?"

"I am wretched and alone. Not a tie of kindred; not a soul on whom I have the slightest claim for care or protection! I have none to comfort me; none to advise."

"If you will permit me to stand to you in the place of a brother, I will be all that a brother should be to you—man gently—"but for comfort in the world, the world which you are evidently passing, you must look up to God, who alone can give peace to the troubled heart."

"I can not look up! I have no courage; no strength!"

"Strength will come in answer to prayer, my sister; and not death, but life is the sun for cheering the spirit. Will you come back to it?"

His friendly hand drew her away from the edge of the river; the strange personification of his youth had a motion of feeling to her sore spirit. She sank down in his terror the fatal doom from which he had saved her.

"I will go back!" she cried, earnestly—I will do you no evil! Only show me the way to that—"

It seemed that he knew her resolution, and led her up the path to the cottage which she had quit so suddenly before. The lamp still burn brightly; the fire was fully on the hearth. He took her hand in his, and gently removed her shawl with the cold hands of a winter's snow, and then took a seat, like it on the floor end of the hearth. During the space of silence, sitting side by side, two so strangely brought together, Ruth had begun to perceive fully the face of her unknown master.

This face was pale, its features finely though slightly aged; the curve of the nose well defined; the mouth a

Her mouth was tamer and less timid as a woman's. It was a face of spiritual strength and beauty—the face of one who had lived and suffered.

"You are Ruth Mowbray! I recognized you at once, from living seen you sometimes at church. And I am John Rutherford, the pastor of Windmill."

She knew, now, to whom she owed her life—the young clergyman, whose burning eloquence, had won so many weary ones to cast their burdens at the foot of the Cross.

She arose, and held out her hand to him. From the fullness of her heart she spoke:

"Sir, you have saved my soul from death. For this I thank you. During the day and night which are gone I have been and—but I trust the troublous is over. Some time, to show you the troubldous of my gratitude, and to prove to you that I had some cause for distress, I will confess to you what has happened. I may kiss. It will fill me with shame, yet I owe it to God for the sin I was about to commit against Him."

"Ruth, my sister, I ask of you no confidence which it is not your pleasure to give, but when you are saddle and hopeless, come to me freely, that I may share the weight of the burden."

He looked into her eye with calm sympathy—his hand was upon the latch, to go.

"You will be true to your word—you will think of that troubleless kingdom no more! I can trust you."

He would open her lips fully, open all the doors and pass out.

Ruth fell on her knees, and while thanking God that she had been taken from temptation, she prayed earnestly for that person whom perchance all might call "her."

CHAPTER VI.

MAPLEWOOD.

"The old, old sea; as one in tears,
Comes murmuring with its sandy lips." —Rae.

WINIFRED's life at Maplewood was like that of many another proud, beautiful woman wedded to a man for whom no love is entertained. A fate the hardest and bitterest that can fall to the lot of woman! A home without love—a union but in name—a wretched farce to which death alone can draw down the curtain!

In all things, Winifred studied to obey her husband: his slightest wishes were her laws. She had said to herself that in expiation of her weakness in yielding to an unrighteous, she would be to Mr. Winthrop a true, faithful, and obedient wife. She felt for him no affection, therefore she was cold and calm toward him, and his demands to her partook of the same haughty indifference.

Two years of this existence—it could scarcely be called life—and, outwardly, Winifred was unchanged, save that her loveliness had ripened and grown more perfect. That she admired, and flattered as she was, not an hour of happiness had she known since the doors of Atherton Hall had closed behind her, when she had gone forth a bride.

Winifred Winthrop's twentieth birthday approached; it arrived, at length. The air was fragrant with such its sweet blossoms, but there was no fragrance at Maplewood. A night of wild doubt and anxiety, at that of May, drew on; but with the morning light came a happy conclusion.

Mrs. Winthrop was the mother of a daughter.

The father's delight was unparallelled. For the first time in life he a thrill warmer than admiration except that of a being for his wife, because she had brought him this great blessing.

A son to bear his proud name, to inherit his vast fortune, to keep up the honor of his family!

Maplewood was thrown open to rejoicing. Laughter echoed around the lofty halls, lamps flashed, wine flowed, and in her darkened chamber languished the young wife; struggling with weakness—praying for life only that she might enjoy it with her precious child.

Who can fathom the depth of tenderness in the heart of a mother? Who can feel for that little helpless waif of humanity like her who has suffered to bring it into existence? Whose care is like hers, so gentle and tender? Who else on earth loves a little child but its mother?

It was strange to see how Winifred's proud heart softened and grew tender as an angel's toward that wee child. When she was able to rise from her bed, she would sit, for hours, gazing into its soft dark eyes, and twisting its silken hair about her fingers. The servants said that their mistress idealized the babe; and so it seemed, for never upon any account would she permit it to sleep away from her breast, and no amusement was powerful enough in its attraction to draw her from the care of her son.

Mr. Winthrop named the boy William, after its paternal grandfather, but Winifred shortened it to Willie—the world had a sweeter sound, she said.

Strongly as she was attached to Willie, her love met with a full return. Before he was three months old, he had learned to love her sheltering arms above any other resting-place. He would pitiously whine taken away from her but for a moment; and when a year had passed over his bright head, and he had begun to toddle carefully about from one thing to another, he would never quit the protecting clasp of her hand, or go to the arms of strangers. He seemed to shrink from his father, and would kiss no one save his mother, either for threats or persuasions.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORLD'S HONORS AND A SEASON'S MYSTERIES.

"From lofty hills and fertile vales,
 From hut and palace halls,
 From hamlet, town, and city's din,
 The country's clarion calls!
 And men go forth with swelling hearts,
 To win an empty name—
 They quaff their wine from golden cups,
 And call the bubble, *Fame*."

AXONTHOTS:

"O'er all these hung the shadow of a fear,
 A sense of mystery the spirit dwelt;
 And said, as plain as whisper in the ear—
 'The place is haunted!'"

H. A.

MILFORD WINTHROP was the successful candidate. His name was enrolled among the honored rolls of his country; there was a seat in the senate hall, at Washington, waiting for his occupancy.

He was very proud of the result, won by his money more than by his worth, and he entered his wife's room with an elastic step. He was the bearer of important tidings, and he gave her them with an air of extreme satisfaction.

"Mrs. Winthrop, you are a senator's wife!"
 She bowed her head over her child, and simply said, in reply:

"Very well, Mr. Winthrop."

Three months spent in preparation, and then the newly-elected senator and his wife started for Washington. Milford had hoped to be left at home, but Mr. Winthrop was proud of her regal beauty, and this pride could only be gratified by the display of his treasure.

So to the gay capital went Mrs. Winthrop and her child. An elegant mansion, on Mellon Square, received them, in whose spacious drawing-rooms Mr. Winthrop held court unequalled in brilliancy even by those of the President himself.

Thus passed the first winter and the succeeding summer. The August heats were approaching, but Congress had not yet concluded its session. An unusual press of business still detained the august body at the metropolis; but most of the members' families had left town for some rural place of resort.

Winifred began to languish for the cool air of the country; and Mr. Winthrop proposed that she should spend a few weeks at Newport or the Virginia Springs. To this she objected; she wanted rest and quiet rather than a mere change of excitement: some retired place in the country would answer every purpose.

She had heard much of the fine natural scenery of Rappahannock county, and she desired to pass the remainder of the summer in some little village of that mountainous region.

At the mention of Rappahannock county, Mr. Winthrop became strangely agitated.

"Madam, you will do me a favor by never again referring to this out-of-the-way place as a summer residence. The plan is abominable."

"Why should you object, sir, to a section of country justly celebrated for its salubrious airs and beautiful scenery? Since it meets my wishes, I hardly see what cause you have for interfering in the matter?" Winifred spoke coldly and haughtily—and he replied as coldly.

"I have sufficient cause. My son is to go with you, I presume; and it becomes me to see that he is carried to a proper place. As for my reasons for taking exception to Rappahannock county, it is sufficient that I object!"

And for the time the subject dropped.

A few days afterward, Mr. Winthrop obtained leave of absence from congressional duties, and took a journey into the interior of Virginia. When he returned, he declared that his objections to Rappahannock county were entirely removed. Besides, he said, had called him into that section, and he had found it all that could be desired for a temporary sojourn. So well had he been pleased, that he had engaged an old mansion a few miles beyond Warrenton—called the Blue Ridge—and caused it to be fitted up for the reception of his wife and child.

"Bull Run?"—so the place was called, having a fine old

estate, but the family to which it had belonged were mostly dead; and of late, Bellemonte had been sadly neglected.

Mr. Winthrop had secured a trusty negro and his wife to preside over the establishment; and this worthy couple, with Jack, the coachman, and Fanny, the cook, would comprise the kitchen household. Mrs. Winthrop might take with her as many attendants as she chose.

Winifred immediately commenced her preparations for leaving Washington. Two days afterward she set forth, Mr. Winthrop accompanying her as an escort; and Remy, her own maid, to attend to the personal wants of her mistress.

After seeing his wife safely installed at Bellemonte, Mr. Winthrop bade her farewell and returned to Washington.

Bellemonte was a wildly beautiful spot, in the rear vicinity of the lofty hills known as the Blue Ridge. It was thickly wooded with fir-trees of a stunted growth; and half the plantation was covered with huge boulders, which the spring floods from time to time had rolled down from the mountains.

The old mansion itself was dreary and weird enough for any tale of darkness that might be related of it. It was a house where men had lived and died; and one of our native poets says that all such are "haunted houses."

The rooms were low and dark from the creeping vines that covered the windows; the wainscots were black with age, and rotten and worm-eaten in many places. The chambers were mostly hung with tapestry, once wrought in beautiful patterns of gorgeous colors, by fair fingers now no longer perchance like their work; and the furniture—all of dark oak, must have belonged to another generation.

A large portion of the house was uninhabitable; but in the north wing, facing the mountains, three apartments, on the first floor, had been fitted up, not only comfortably, but luxuriously.

The sleeping-room of Winifred and her child was a charming, cosy place; its high, narrow windows commanded a full view of the hills, and Winifred only regretted that the basement was at this point so very high as to preclude all hope of getting to the ground from the spacious balcony. She thought she would have liked to go out for her walks from

this room, rather than be obliged to traverse the whole length of a gloomy corridor, amid the ruins, to reach the hall door.

Bellemonte was the property of a family by the name of Brandon, the only remaining member of which was far away. And this was all the information that Winifred could obtain by questioning Aunt Phillis, the colored housekeeper, who was remarkably taciturn for one of her class.

One apartment of the old house, rescued from the general decay by recent repairs, was a very Blue Bear's chamber of horrors to the fancy of Winifred. It was much like the other rooms in its vicinity, save that across the windows were strong iron bars; and the doors were secured with treble bolts *on the outside*. There was no fireplace or other convenience for warmth, and the walls were covered with thick green baize.

"Phillis," said Mrs. Winthrop, seeking the old woman in the kitchen, "there is a room in close vicinity to mine that has aroused my curiosity."

"'Deed, missus, dat's mighty cur'us," replied Phillis, giving the step-up she was scouring a vigorous rub with her black hand.

"Can you tell me what it was used for? The room with the bolts on the outside of the door, and the walls covered with green flannel, I mean."

"Like enough it was de parlor."

"But the bars across the windows? and the lack of a fireplace, and the green cloth?" continued Winifred intently.

"Bars to keep the owls out, and green good for bad eyes, I've learn say. Seems to me, missus is mighty 'squishive!'"

And with this reasonable solution of the green-room mystery, Winifred was obliged to content herself.

The days passed pleasantly enough at Bellemonte, save that the mistress had too much time for thought. She was alone once more; free to enjoy undisturbed the society of her darling child, now a beautiful boy of two years; but in spite of this sweet soliloquy, she found her thoughts constantly recurring to the pleasant evenings spent in the parlor of Atherton Hall with Gerard Middleton.

And, try as she would, the old memories could not be effaced; and when the anguish which they caused became too

great to bear, she would take little Willie in her arms and set out on a long ramble over the hills.

One August night, Mrs. Winthrop sat in her chamber trying to read; Willie slumbered in his crib by her side; Rosy was in bed in the adjoining room, and every thing around the house was hushed to the profoundest quiet.

It had been one of those sultry days peculiar to ripe summer, and the dull, torpid atmosphere was prolific of repose. Her book was uninteresting; the lamp burned dimly; a house-fly droned lazily on the window; and Winifred, actuated by surrounding influences, sank back in her chair and fell asleep.

She was awakened suddenly by some strange sound. The lamp had gone out, but the starlight streamed faintly into the room. Plainly discernible in the gloom of the place was a tall, gaunt figure, standing erect between this starlight and the window, from which the curtain was looped back. A Leman figure, with eyes like live coals, and long hair, white as snow, streaming around it like a shroud! This horrible shape advanced and leaned over the bed of little Willie; one skinny hand was extended, bearing aloft a glittering knife; the other held back the delicately-embroidered silk of the coverlet in the form of the innocent sleeper!

Winifred, with a fierce cry, leaped to her feet and confronted the strange visitant.

A wild, demoniac "Ha! ha! ha!" burst from the creature's lips, and simultaneously it melted away, as by some invisible agency, leaving the terror-stricken mother alone with her child.

Recovering herself by a powerful effort, Winifred searched the room with the strictest scrutiny. She left no dark corner unexamined—yet she discovered nothing. She looked to the doors and windows—they were securely fastened, and yet a guest had been admitted to her very boudoir.

It was not a dream; she was fully convinced of that. It was something real and tangible, but of what nature? She did not believe in supernatural apparitions; but she was superstitious; and yet a cold, shuddering thrill ran through her as she held the babe to her breast.

She watched the night away, for she could not have slept

with that strange, inexplicable fear at her heart. She resolved to say nothing to any one of the occurrence; Rosy was exceedingly timid, and the negroes invariably kept one eye, at least, out for ghosts, and they would be afraid to remain in the house if they once got wind of the idea that the place was haunted; and she had no wish to be left alone. So she kept silent and watchful.

August was drawing to a close. The middle of September Mrs. Winthrop was to leave Bellemonte, and return to Maplewood, where she would remain until the winter session of Congress should usher in the gay season at Washington.

It was a bright summer day, and the unusual coolness of the air had invited to out-of-door exercise. Winifred had indulged herself in a very long walk, and being quite weary, she went to her bed earlier than was her custom. Willie had coaxed mamma to lie down beside him and tell him a story; and the simple tale finished, the two, mother and child, were locked in slumber.

Willie's head was nestled close to his mother's bosom, her bright, soft curls mingling with the brown rings that clustered around his full white forehead.

Winifred slept uneasily—a vague sense of insecurity had oppressed her all the day, and her slumber was troubled with wild dreams and distorted visions.

The touch of some cold substance upon her face awoke her. She knew not what this substance was, but it struck an icy chill to her heart. She lifted her hand to push it away, and that wild, unapatly "Ha! ha! ha!" heard once before, burst on the air.

With a terrified cry Winifred sprang from the couch and peered into the gloom. The same demon face, with horrible black eyes and snow-white hair, hovered above her! The same savage teeth, with the lips drawn tightly away from them, glittered before her!

Winifred bounded forward, and seizing the heavy bronze candlestick, aimed it at the intruder. The light was extinguished as the missile fell; there was a dull, dead sound as of the closing of a great door at some immeasurable distance—and then the silence of death fell upon the chamber.

Willie slept quietly in his bed, and Winifred stood alone in the center of the floor.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

" Yet, though thou wear'st the glory of the sky,
 Wilt thou not keep the same beloved name?
 The same fair form and gently-beaming eye?
 Lovelier in heaven's sweet climate; yet the same?"

BRYANT.

It was a horrible mystery! Winifred longed, yet trembled, to fathom it. She hoped not to be obliged to ask for aid. She would rather encounter all the danger, if danger there was, and run all the risks.

Night followed night, and during the dark hours that determined woman never closed her eyes. What little rest she had was taken by day, when the household were astir, and Rasy awake to take charge of the child.

Winifred's father had but one brother, named George; and this George Atherton was one of the bravest and most daring men in the country. He had hardly earned the title of colonel, and though now an old man, he had always taken great delight in teaching his niece the use of warlike weapons. To please the old colonel, the girl had taken lessons in fencing, and was quite an adept in the use of firearm. In a sudden moment her father had presented her with a box of pistol, and these little desperate weapons had been for years in the false bottom of her trunk.

Now she took them out, loaded the barrels carefully, and placed them on the stand by her bedside, resolved that if she should be again favored with a visit from the mysterious soul that had twice appeared to her, to try the effect of cold steel upon it.

But it did not seem likely that her courage would last. Time passed on monotonously, without variation, and but two nights more remained to Winifred at Bellmount.

The intervening day must be spent in packing and making

other needful arrangements for traveling; and wearied and drowsy, Winifred threw herself upon the lounge, without undressing, to catch a few moments' repose before the depth of the night should come. She knew that all her strength would be required for her labors of to-morrow.

She gave Rosy imperative orders to remain awake until she called her; and the girl, seated before the little fire, which the dampness of the night had made agreeable, with an entertaining novel in her hand, readily promised obedience.

Winifred soon fell asleep, for she was very weary, and she knew nothing more till she heard the hall-clock striking one.

She started up and put out her arm to clasp her child, but he was not by her side! His place was empty—he was gone! A wild shriek rose to her lips, but she stilled it instantly. Rosy must have taken him up, she said to herself, by way of assurance. She flew to the side of the girl—Rosy was sound asleep.

"Willie! where is Willie?" demanded the distractèd mother, in a frenzy of suspense.

Rosy rubbed her eyes, and stared around her with a blank air.

"I have not seen him, madam," she said, "since I laid him down on the bed with you. As I hope for heaven, mistress, I have not!"

Oh! but those who called Mrs. Winthrop cold and passionless should have seen her then.

She roused the whole household instantly, and searched the mansion in most haste. She went herself into the deepest recesses of the mucky, tomb-like cellar, and through the heavily-flamed arches which supported the massive weight of the buildings.

Flame-cans were lighted, and the terrible negroes, led on by the resolute woman, searched every dell and dingle and ran-sacked every house in the vicinity. Slaves from the nearest plantations turned out and joined them, their quick sympathies awakened by the cry:

"The child of the Lady of Belmont has been stolen!"

All day the search went on; Winifred, pale, but firm, looking the van, and returning at nightfall only to see if her husband had arrived.

Mr. Winthrop had flown to the spot at the first alarm of the telegraph.

A more wildly, despairing man was never seen. His face was shrouded in a deathly pallor, his thin lips were rigid as those of a corpse, and his eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets. A couple of miles behind his horse had fallen dead under him, unable to endure the pace at which he was ridden; and the fresh animal that had been procured at Warrenton, was bathed in foam.

Mr. Winthrop grasped his wife rudely by the arm, and demanded the particulars of his son's loss. Coldly and briefly she revealed all to him—keeping nothing back.

He struck his forehead with his clenched hand.

"Great God!" he cried, madly, "it is as I thought. Oh, fool—fool that I was to consent to have my innocent child brought to the place where *she* drew breath! I might have known—but, O heaven, how fearfully am I punished!" He turned to the gaping negroes. "Saddle the fleetest horse in the stables! and you, Jack, get upon the other, and follow me over the mountains! I must reach Woodstock before day-break!"

Winifred would have accompanied the horsemen, but Mr. Winthrop thrust both her and her maid into a chamber, and locked the door upon them.

Who can imagine the feelings of the wretched mother while thus incarcerated!

The night wore on—a night of anguished suffering to Winifred Winthrop. She paced the narrow limits of her chamber unceasingly; throwing open the casement, and leaning far out into the darkness in the vain hope of hearing some sound indicative of the return of those gone in search of her child. No sound broke the stillness.

Rosy had sobbed her elf to sleep on the floor; they two were isolated from the other women of the establishment—unfriendly and helpless; but Winifred never thought of that. She would have braved ten thousand deaths, if the act could have restored to her her Willie.

At last the day broke open the eastern gates; the morning came, and the sun arose clear and smiling. Winifred took up her station at a window which commanded a view of the park

taken by Mr. Winthrop, and with fixed gaze she watched for the first indications of the return. She thought she perceived a dark, moving object, away on the very verge of the horizon—a mere speck—it grew larger—yes, there were two of them—two horsemen! They wound slowly down the mountain—she recognized them now; Mr. Winthrop bearing a bundle in his arms, carefully enveloped in a cloak, and the negro Jack following behind.

They were approaching the house; she could endure constraint no longer! Grasping the massive iron poker from the fender, she brought it to bear with all her strength against the door. Again and again the blow fell—the white oak quivered; the bolts held fast, but the hinges were old and rusty, and could not withstand the strain. They yielded; another frantic blow, they broke; the door flew open with a crash, and Winifred dashed out into the corridor and down the stairs.

She reached the outer door just as the equestrians rode up. Mr. Winthrop strove to avoid her, but she sprang upon him, and, with the strength of a giant, snatched the cloaked burden from his arms.

The man seemed to be enraged by the action—all the fierce passions of his nature leaped hotly into his face.

"Give him to me! Deaf as he is, I claim him! He is mine—mine only!" he cried, savagely. "Was it not enough, madam, that you should inflict on bringing him here to certain destruction? And now you would again take him from me?"

"Hush! I am his mother! And would to Heaven that none of your blood ran in his veins, as none of your inhuman passions ever dwelt in his breast!"

Winifred was stung by her husband's harshness. All the high, proud temper of an Atherton was aroused. And he, enraged and embittered by the state of an awakened conscience, and rended, by grief, but little better than a maniac, forgot his manhood, and struck her!

She staggered beneath the blow. For a moment her white face took the sanguinary hue of the red rose. But when she spoke, her voice was calm and full.

"For this, I renounce all allegiance to the wretch I have called husband! How forth I am a free woman!"

She turned slowly away, and bore the child but in inti-

the house. Her heart had already told her what she might expect. With fearful composure, she uncovered the body of her child, and gazed upon the dead face. She kissed it tenderly—stroking the dark hair, and murmuring softly—

"Dear Willie! Dear little Willie!"

She asked Mr. Winthrop no questions concerning the night's adventures; but Jack told her all that he knew, in a few words.

Mr. Winthrop had ridden hard, and crossed the most elevated spur of the mountain a little below Front Royal, and had then pushed on rapidly until the Shenandoah river was reached.

He had intended to cross the stream, but it was swollen by recent rains, and it was difficult to find a ford. In searching for this, the body of little Willie was accidentally discovered. It lay close to the water, in the dark shadow of a clump of alders—the man said—and it was his master's opinion that it had died from strangulation. There was a dark circle around the delicate throat, and marks of human fingers deep and purple in the soft flesh! Also, around the place where the remains were found, there were prints of human footsteps in the wet sand, and some shreds of a woman's clothing all rolled up in a thorn-bush in the vicinity. And this was all that was known, and from such scanty information what inference was to be drawn?

Terrible suspicions touching Milford Winthrop, came to Winifred's ears from the neighboring people; the dark veil which covered his darker past life, was partially untriven; and, what she saw and understood was enough to make her shrink with abhorrence from her husband; the man whom the world admired—the distinguished senator!

Winifred's great and overwhelming grief for her child swallowed up all lesser trouble, and for the seven days which followed his death, she walked like one in a trance.

Mechanically she prepared herself to leave Belmont; mechanically she suffered them to take her to Washington, and from thence to Maplewood.

Like one without life or feeling, she looked upon her boy in his coffin, and saw him lying in the grave, high above the moaning of the sea on the sandy shore. And when the sun,

were laid smoothly over his grave, and she had put her aching forehead to the cool turf to still its wild throbings, she arose, and stood up alone, knowing that her duty here was ended!

CHAPTER IX.

FINDING PEACE.

"Friend, thou must trust in Him who trod before
The desolate paths of life;
Must bear in meekness, as He meekly bore,
Sorrow and toil and strife.
Trust then in Him, and yield not to despair!
Christ, in His heaven of heavens will hear thy prayer!"

From the German of Uhland.

The acquaintance so singularly begun between Ruth Mowbray and Mr. Rutherford, progressed steadily, until it ripened into perfect confidence.

In the young pastor, Ruth found a kind, and sympathizing friend; a tender brother. He encouraged her when she despaired—cheered her when she was sad—he gently led her gently on to seek peace and rest upon the eternal arm of God's salvation! She went to his church—listened to his discourses, so searching, yet so full of love; and understood why his people almost worshipped him. He was poor in this world's goods, but rich in heavenly treasures. *Here*, he walked humbly with the holy ones of earth; *there*, in the realms of glory, no angel would wear a brighter crown than he!

One evening, when she had known him for more than a year, Ruth revealed to this kind friend the little history of her life. She told him of her hopeless, unavailing love; of her mad despair, and temptation—the rest, he already knew.

He comforted her as none other could have done; then, to show her that he fully appreciated her confidence, he gave her his own in return.

"I was born," he said, "in the great, bustling city of New Orleans, of parents who toiled for their daily bread. My father was a house carpenter; my mother added something to our scanty income by the needle-work. When I was about fifteen

teen, my poor father was fatally injured by the fall of a stag-ing. I remember well my mother's despair when they brought him home, and the surgeon said that his days were numbered! He died the next day, in great agony. After the funeral expenses were paid, we found ourselves almost without a penny! My mother redoubled her exertions, and I was fortunate enough to secure a situation as clerk. I had, always by dint of much economy, been kept at school, and my education was uncommonly good for a lad of my age. Every leisure moment was devoted to study.

"Through the kindness of a schoolmaster, I was enabled to read many valuable works. Under his auspices I gained an acquaintance with the classics. At length, I became a teacher. The salary was better than that which I received from my present employers, and the labors more congenial. I accordingly entered upon the charge of the school. Here, again, I owed much to my good old friend. In all the visits I went to him; and, whatever success crowned my efforts, I must attribute to his judicious advice. By degrees, I rose to be assistant-preceptor in a flourishing academy, in the State of North Carolina; and here I first met Catharine Hazeland.

"That meeting was an era in my life. Miss Hazeland was a New Englander, but having family connections in the South, she had come hither to finish her education, and at the same time to benefit her health. I can hardly convey to you a correct idea of this girl's exceeding beauty. She was one of the loveliest creatures I ever beheld. I think it was a case of love at first sight on my part; and I often say to myself that the fair girl was not wholly indifferent to me. She flushed at my approach—her hand trembled when it met mine in friendly greeting. If I had cause (with others of her class) to regret her probably learned lessons, her eyes would swim in tears.

"Catharine was the only daughter and heiress of a wealthy father, and, in consequence, had been the belle of the quiet country village which she called home. Now, indeed, her wealth and beauty were pastores to favor, and she was indeed a very queen. Sometimes I thought her proud and self-satisfied, but a single glance of her beautiful eyes disarmed all suspicion, but those of love, and I was more completely her slave than before. Strange it is that men, with all their boasted power

will be so blind, that the simplest school-girl can deceive the best of them!

"But I would not blame Catharine. She had been petted and flattered till the good in her nature was almost eradicated, and she was a most arrant coquette. She led me on to hope—my ardent devotion was very pleasant to her; and when, at length, I confessed all, and besought her to read my fate, she did not cast me utterly away. But I must wait, she said. She liked me—perhaps she loved me a little, but we were both young, and I was comparatively uneducated. She laid her head, she said, on marrying a *bored* man, and I must oblige her by becoming this. A college course would improve me; when I had graduated with honor, she would give me a more definite answer. Inspired by hope, I taxed body and mind to the utmost. When twenty years of age, I entered the University at Chapel Hill, in advance. My dear mother sacrificed many a sorely-needed comfort that my darling wish might be accomplished; and, as for myself, my life was bound up in the acquirement of knowledge. I wrote to Catharine many times—letters filled with fire and devotion—and twice she wrote me in return. These letters were kept next my heart, and read and re-read scores of times a day. You will think me an enthusiast, dear Ruth, but I was little more than a boy then, and worshiped my mistress with a boy's passionate fervor.

"I spent two years at Chapel Hill; and then, with the laurels of that fine old institution fresh and green on my brow, I bade farewell to my mother, and set out for Middlebury, Catharine's home—to lay them at her feet. I did not reach Middlebury until after the shades of evening had fallen; but, weary as I was, I could not wait until morning to see Catharine. I sought out her father's house, a large and handsome building, in a quiet, aristocratic street. The mansion was lighted up as if for a festival. Colored lamps swung from the shrubbery in the gardens; and a score of elegant equipages were drawn up before the door. The great porters were one file of rankers; and I entered together with a fresh reinforcement of guests.

"And judge, if you can, of the emotions that filled my soul when standing hidden behind the silken window curtains, I

saw Catharine Hazelwood married to a man twice her years—a man rich in lands and stocks—who had won her with his gilded offerings!

"I sought an interview with the bride, and charged her with her falsity in no measured terms. She laughed in my face. She hoped, she said, that I was not so shallow as to think any thing of that youthful flirtation. It had amused her finely in that dull old school-day life—she should have died of it, if it had not been for me, and she most heartily thanked me for the favor I had done her in helping her kill time. Now, she trusted I would ignore the past, and regard her simply as a very good friend.

"I went out from her presence a changed man. I had seen my infatuation; my glaring ideal stood before me rebuked of the love which had clothed her in the perfection of womanliness! I no longer thrilled at the sound of her name. My passion had died a violent death, and I buried it, and placed upon its sepulchre the stone of indifference. Henceforth, I resolved to live for others rather than for myself. I took the armor of the most high God upon me, and His gospel into my mouth! In this service I found happiness—happiness such as the world is powerless to give—or take away! Peace, founded on the Rock of Everlasting Love!"

"I brought my mother here to your pleasant New England, and here we have set up our humble home; and here I hope to spend the remainder of my days in content. I ask no other destiny than that which awaits me as a minister of God's truth, and may He call me to so exercise my one talent that good may be done unto my people!"

And this was John Rutherford's life history, and Ruth wept over his disappointment, and smiled over his victory.

After this mutual confidence, a strong attachment grew between Ruth Mowbray, and the young minister.

CHAPTER X.

THE MILLINER'S FORTUNE.

"In life can love be bought with gold?
Are friendship's pleasures to be sold?"

DR. JOHNSON

RUTH MOWBRAY went often to the parsonage, and sat at the feet of the mild-browed woman whom John Rutherford called mother, and listened to the teaching that fell from her lips. Mrs. Rutherford was a gentle spirit, trusting all her hopes and wishes unreservedly in God's hands, complaining never of fate, and enduring trials and crosses with saintly patience. Would that there were more like her, that their holy example might lead many, now in doubt, to the true source of all happiness and everlasting safety!

And gradually the heart of Ruth Mowbray took up a new song. At first its notes were low and feeble, but gathering strength with the nurturing lapse of time, it widened and broadened until its mighty surges swept the master-chords of her being into perfect harmony.

At the sound of ~~one~~ footstep she flushed and trembled; at the touch of ~~one~~ hand she was filled with strange bliss; ~~one~~ voice had power to banish all care and sorrow from her soul!

Typhus fever, of the most virulent kind, broke out in Wimbley-fall. Almost every home was a house of sickness, and perhaps of death. Whole families were swept away, and terror seized upon the whole population.

In this time of universal sorrow, Ruth Mowbray was a good angel. She ministered unceasingly at the bedside of the sick and dying, and many a desolate, suffering one was made comfortable by her kind care. No hand was softer than hers on the hot brow, and no footstep fell so noiselessly on the distractèd ear.

Mr. Rutherford, also, visited the sick untiringly, and advised and helped to their necessities with his own hands; he comforted the living, and prayed for the repose of the dead.

As the cooler weather of autumn approached, the fever cases diminished, and the fearful mortality was abated. But there were still scores of the afflicted, and Ruth Mowbray's services as "watcher" were almost nightly called into requisition.

For two nights she had kept a vigil by the bed of an aged woman, and at daybreak closed her eyes in death, and now, on the third night, she was looking forward to the luxury of undisturbed repose. She retired early to her chamber, and without undressing lay down on the bed. But sleep, so much wished for, refused to come. In vain she covered her eyes with her hand, in vain she counted the ticking of the clock, and fancied herself on the verge of dreamland—she was wide awake as ever. She thought that perhaps the light of the stars shining through her window at the foot of her bed troubled her, and rising she let down the curtain. But no, sleep still held aloof. The clock struck one, and almost simultaneously with the sound, a dull red glare shone into the chamber. It was not the moon, for that had set long ago behind the western hills. Brighter and redder gleamed the light. Ruth sprang up and threw open the window. The whole vicinity was glowing like noonday, and the sky glowed like blood.

The light was that of a burning building, and from her station at the window, Ruth had no difficulty in discovering that the parsonage was on fire.

She flew down the stairs, and hurried through the fields that lay between her cottage and the churchyard. She thought perhaps she could aid in saving some of the furniture from destruction. To her surprise, she found not the usual crowd gathered to witness the conflagration, for every one who was not languishing on a bed of sickness, was thoroughly worn out with attendance on others; and at this hour of the night probably the entire neighborhood was wrapped in sleep.

The fire had not yet taken hold of the main building, but was confined to a back wing used as a storehouse and kitchen. Ruth tried the front door, but it was fastened on the inside, and then she was sure that the inmates had not escaped.

With a shudder she remembered that Mr. Rutherford had not slept for four nights, and consequently, in the depth of his

Weasiness, the roar of the flames had failed to awaken him. And Mrs. Rutherford and the servant-girl, where were they? Unconscious in the burning house, and unless speedily aroused, doomed to a fearful and inevitable death.

The flames had made rapid headway, and were now seizing on the roof of the principal building. A few moments more, and it would be too late! Some of the neighbors had now arrived, and eagerly the cry for Mr. Rutherford and his family ran around the circle. For reply, Ruth pointed to the house.

A murmur of dismay broke on the air, for all saw the impossibility of finding any one with sufficient courage to dare the entrance of that blazing building.

"Not escape! Good God! then they must perish!" cried a white-haired old man. "No human being could live long in such a smoke as that!" he pointed to the roof from whence a volley of smoke was issuing.

"I must go for them," said Ruth. "I can not stand by and see them perish!"

A score of arms were raised to stay her course, but she sprang clear of them all, and dashing open the low window leading into the little sitting-room, she stepped inside. The apartment, though untouched by the fire, was filled with the stifling stench of smoke, and the crackling of the flames in the next room would have dismayed any heart not nerved with surer courage. Up the broad stairs flew the daring girl, and along the corridor to the chamber door of Mrs. Rutherford. The portal was thrown open from within, and the old lady, pale but calm, met her on the threshold.

"Your son? where is he?" Ruth asked the question quickly, impatient of a second's delay.

"Yon' r! I was going to call him;" she indicated a distant door, where the flames were sweeping down hotly from the ceiling, and the red cinders fell in a thick cloud.

Ruth bounded along the passage, and flung open the door of the chamber. The fire scorched her hair, and the heat of the air burned her feet, but she did not hesitate.

Mr. Rutherford lay on the bed, wrapped in a dressing-gown and sleeping quietly as an infant, all unconscious of the peril which surrounded him.

Ruth grasped his shoulder, and shook him violently.

"Wake up! Wake up!" she cried. "Follow me! the house is on fire!"

He sprang to his feet, and gazed around him with blank amazement.

"You here, dear Ruth! Leave me instantly! I will come—but stay, where is my mother and Katharine?"

"Your mother is in safety by this time, but Katharine—I had forgotten her."

"Go, then, this moment! I will arouse the girl. Go, dear one, and God keep you!"

They left the room together, and together they met the fiery billow of flame that surged down to meet them. Grasping Ruth's hand firmly in his own, the young minister hurried on to the chamber where the servant-girl slept. He pushed open the door—Katharine lay in a swoon in the center of the floor—the fright had been too much for her. Rutherford raised her up.

"Go before me down the stairs, Ruth," he said; "I must save this poor creature, at all hazards."

The trembling girl obeyed him, and they made the descent in safety. But not a moment too soon! With a loud crash, the stairway fell in, and the burning rafters of the roof covered their retreat with a sea of fire.

The outer air was reached at last, and scorched and faint, Ruth Mowbray sank down at the feet of Mrs. Rutherford.

A moment more, and the once pleasant parsonage lay upon the ground, a heap of blazing timbers, and a pyre of crimson light!

The houseless family went home with Ruth, where they remained until mid-winter, when a new home was made ready for them on the site of the old one.

And not long after their removal, John Rutherford, sitting by the side of his fair preserver, asked her to put her hand in his, and walk with him through life. Her hand sank to rest on his shoulder—she was glad to lay it there; and she did not resist the gentle arm that drew her close to his strong, true heart.

CHAPTER XI.

MY LADY.

"Gentle, and lovely, and high-born was she—"

ALANSON.

The pastor of Windfall was standing before his cottage door, when a Boston coach stopped at the gate, and a stranger inquired if Ruth Mowbray resided in the neighborhood.

"Ruth Mowbray? yes, sir—yonder is her home."

"Thank you, sir; and if you are a friend of hers, you will rejoice at hearing of her good fortune. Ruth Mowbray is Ruth Mowbray no longer, but Lady Ruth Manchester, the heiress of one of the finest estates in England. To communicate this intelligence I am seeking her. Good morning, sir."

Ruth Mowbray no longer! but Lady Ruth Manchester! Mr. Rutherford said the words over again and again, as a deep shade of sadness settled on his usually placid brow. A titled heiress! what would she care for the love of a poor and humble clergymen? would she renounce the pomp and panoply which awaited her beyond the sea, to share his lowly lot, and reign in his lowly heart?

In spite of faith, doubt came upon him. He entered his chamber; closed and locked the door, and on his knees supplicated for strength to bear whatever might be in store for him.

"She was always beautiful—now, she is rich and titled—yet why should I murmur? If this blackness of degradation should fall on my life, I can only cling closer to the God of goodness, who never willingly afflicts. I will trust!"

He felt soothed and strengthened; and, believing that all would be ordered for the best, he went cheerfully about his daily duties. His mother saw the struggle in his feelings, but she forbore her sympathy—save by the prayers which she sent to Heaven, that this cup might pass from him.

Of course Windfall was alive with the news. Lord Henry Drexel had died without heirs; and Mrs. Mowbray had been

his only sister; consequently, to her chill, as next of kin descended the property of the Earl—amounting to eighty thousand pounds sterling; together with the title of Lady Manchester.

There was a younger niece of the dead peer, who came in for a small annuity; for the rest, the quiet little dress-maker was its sole proprietress.

Mr. Montague, the agent of the late Lord Dorset, had come to convey the intelligence, and to accompany the young heiress to England.

It was really astonishing to see how quickly people discovered the extraordinary virtues and graces of Ruth Mowbray. Her cottage was flocked with aristocratic visitors; each and all anxious to pay their respects to and congratulate Lady Manchester on her accession to her rightful honors. Presents were sent her by young ladies, who had hitherto treated her with contempt.

To no one did Ruth see fit to give her confidence. Windfall, with all its gossips, could not ascertain whether she intended to remove to England, and assume her rights and honors, or whether she would remain where she was—content with being the queen of the village. Great anxiety was felt on this score; envious maidens heartily wished her beyond the Atlantic; for their particular favorites among the young men had suddenly become aware of the fact that Ruth was the fairest and most winning damsel in the village; and how it would all end none knew. Mr. Montague, the agent, had quarters in Boston, and when questioned regarding Lady Manchester's intentions was particularly close-mouthed on the subject. Curiosity, for once, was banished. As for John Rutherford, he held aloof. He would not influence the girl, he said; he would not hold her unwillingly to her engagement with him, though his heart should break in giving her liberty. Four days rolled by, and still there came to him no message from the young heiress; and rumor said that on the fifth she would sail for England. Rutherford, stern and unmoved, heard the tidings, and still went not near her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BREAD OF LABOR.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them as we will."

SHAKSPEARE.

Mrs. WINTHROP had heard enough, vague though it was, to make her shudder at the very thought of remaining another day with the man whom the law had made her husband.

Willie was dead—the only link that bound her to Mr. Winthrop was severed; and now that she knew Milford Winthrop to be the vilest thing on earth, she was resolved to endure her martyrdom no longer.

She uttered not a word of what she had heard; she made her preparations with silence and dispatch. Her trunks were yet in the depot at Boston; and she had only to arrange the deep-lining dress which she proposed to wear henceforth.

Her jewels, to the value of several thousand dollars, she packed up and forwarded to an old and tried friend of her father's in Roxbury, with instructions to keep them until she should reclaim them.

She had by her about one thousand dollars, and with this she thought to go South and establish a school for young ladies. Her property she still held in her own right, and there was no necessity of her laboring for a living; but employment for the mind she must have. Sad reflections overpowered her when she sat down to dinner, and she had learned it well that the bread which is bought by toil is sweet.

She passed the night—the dim, misty night—upon the grave of her child: it was the last tribute she could pay. Early in the morning she arose from the chill turf, and bade this tomb of her love a long farewell. Two hours later she was in Boston. Reclaiming her trunks, she changed their labels, and as the property of Mrs. Lucy Bell, they were put on the train for

New York. She followed them, and that night she slept in the great metropolis.

Mr. Winthrop was absent on business, and would not discover her flight until pursuit would be useless, for she had left no clue by which she might be traced.

She had fixed on South Carolina as her place of refuge. She would be least likely to be sought in that direction, and would be by no means likely to meet any one from the North in that State, who had known her in happier days. Besides, she had heard much in praise of the genial climate of the Carolinas, and her health was none of the strongest.

Mrs. Bell,—as we must now, for a time at least, denominate Winifred,—hurried on from New York to Charleston, by the steamer. The voyage was unusually long, and the weather boisterous; but at last the spires of Charleston burst into view, and the steamer drew up to the crowded wharf. The busy, bustling scene of confusion for a moment made Mrs. Bell's head turn giddily; she was unused to making her way through such a multitude alone and unprotected; but gathering strength from her very weakness, she stepped on shore and gave her baggage into the guardianship of an officious lackey. He inquired whether she would be driven—she said to some quiet, respectable hotel.

Arrived at an unpretending house in a retired street, the coachman handed her out, and demanded two dollars for his fee. She put her hand in her pocket for her purse—it was not there! In the crowd at the quay she had been robbed!

She explained the matter to the man, who immediately changed his respectful air to the most violent abuse, which he delivered in broken English and bad French.

"Madam can say what she likes—*l'import*! I shall have *de l'argent*, or je ne donnez-vous pas vos bagages!"

"Very well," she returned; "you can retain the trunks; no doubt but you will find in them amply sufficient to pay you for your trouble."

"Madam is one *troupeur*; I no sall have no tricks play'd on me!"

She drew from her finger a ring of exquisite workmanship, set with a single topaz.

"Take this and give me my trunks. Take it; it will purchase your whole establishment!"

"Non! Non! Pierre Le Couvre is no fool. He has seen
t' t' le vado. You is one sheat, I does tink!"

"And I think a wholesome *coup de pied à derrière* would benefit you, and teach you a lesson," cried a young man who had passed near and listened to the colloquy—"so there—"

He flung the little Frenchman a two-dollar note, and at the same time gave him a kick which set him tumbling down the steps into the gutter—muttering as he went—"

"See-r-r-r-e!" with a true Gallic roll of the r.

The young man turned to Mrs. Bell.

"Madam in what manner can I serve you?" he asked, courteously.

He had removed his hat, leaving his forehead bare. She looked attentively into his face, and saw nothing there but manly truth and nobility.

"Sir," said she, "I thank you for the service you have already done me. I am a Northerner, desirous of getting employment as a teacher. I had thought of a school in a small way, but, as some one has abstracted my funds, I shall be compelled—glad—of a place as governess in some private family."

A flash of intelligence passed over the young man's features. He took a few moments for consideration. At length he said—

"I came to this place partly to procure an instructress for my young sisters, whom my mother is unwilling to send away from home; I have been disappointed in the person I had expected to engage; but I hardly regret it, if we can make a bargain to put you in her place."

Mr. Vernon—so the stranger introduced himself—conducted the lady into a parlor of the hotel, and a regular business interview took place between them. The result was favorable to both. Mrs. Bell was engaged at a liberal salary; and before noon of that day she was on her way with her employer to his plantation—"Castle Hill"—several miles above Columbia, on the Wateree river.

At sunset of the third day the travelers reached their destination, and Mrs. Bell was at once made one of the family.

The master of the place was her kind acquaintance of three days—Horace Vernon, whom the early death of his father had left in charge of the family and estates. Mrs. Vernon was still

young, handsome, and thrifty—a fair type of a southern housewife. There were two little fair-haired girls—Horace's sisters—Alice and Mildred; and when the governess saw them, the memory of her own darling, lying dead and cold in his side grave, came over her, and bursting into tears she left the room.

Mrs. Vernon understood at once that some great grief troubled the heart of the stranger, and with true delicacy she forbore to question her. Mrs. Bell would do best without that sympathy which must seem obtrusive, she said; and so she evinced no curiosity, but treated the governess with a kind, motherly attention, very pleasant to the recipient.

Mrs. Bell's life at Castle Hill was calm and pleasant. Mrs. Vernon was like a dear mother to her; and the children loved her so dearly that they were ever ready to render the most implicit obedience to her wishes. Every night when she knelt in prayer, she thanked God that He had cast her lines in such pleasant places.

The Vernon's had taken it for granted that their governess was a widow, and she was willing that the illusion should continue. She never alluded, in any manner, to her past life; and they came to suppose that she had married unhappily, and perhaps against the wishes of her friends, and therefore avoided the theme.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY AND UNEXPECTED EVENTS.

*"Love! I scorn the word! I know it not!
I listen only to the voice that bids me on!
On, whether I will, or no; the stern, cold voice
Of duty!"*

Our heroine had been at Castle Hill three months, and never a word of Mr. Winthrop had reached her, save occasional allusions in the newspapers to his career at Washington.

She was sitting at her sewing, in the parlor, one cold morning in February, when Horace Vernon came in with the week's mail. While he was examining his letters, she took up the brown bundles he had thrown into her lap—the family news,

papers—and tore off the wrapper of the first one that offered. Glancing listlessly over the damp sheet, her eye was caught by the following paragraph.

"TERRIBLE AFFAIR AT THE CAPITAL!"

"We learn from the Washington Globe of the 30th ult., that a duel has taken place between Senator Winthrop, of Massachusetts, and Brandon Lawrence, Esq., of Virginia, which resulted in serious, if not fatal injury to the former. It is thought by the attending physicians that Mr. Winthrop will not survive his wounds, though he may, possibly, live for some weeks longer. He has been removed from his hotel to a private house in Alexandria, where he will be carefully attended. It is said that the meeting between the two gentlemen was caused by some family affairs, which have not yet transpired, and with which we, at present, are not conversant."

There followed a long tirade against the practice of dueling; a bitter editorial on the magnitude of that man's crime who stands up coolly to shoot down his fellow-man—but Mrs. Bell read no farther. She put down the paper, and left the room. Up to her chamber she went, and passed an hour in silent, though troubled thought. At the end of that time, she knew her course of action was determined upon.

The path of duty lay clear and plain before her! The man whom she had promised to honor, obey, and cherish, in sickness as well as in health; lay, perhaps, at the point of death, with no kindred hand to smooth his pillow, or wipe the clammy sweat from his brow. He was stricken down in his manhood—stricken by his own graceless act—the victim of a false code of honor—the outcast of good men—the companion of the dead and stained. She felt no regard for Missord Winthrop; yet she would go to him, now, in his dire extremity!

She hastily packed a few articles of necessary clothing in a pocket; dressed herself for travelling, and descended to the parlor, where Mrs. Vernon and her son were sitting. Her hand trembled as she entered the presence of those two friends, for a moment she was tempted to throw herself beneath their friendly steps and give them her entire confidence, but she resisted the impulse, and in a few brief words informed them that a circumstance had occurred which rendered it necessary for her to go north for a while. She regretted, she said, while she

could not obviate the necessity; and would, if Providence permitted, return to Castle Hill, and fulfil her engagement. Mrs. Vernon was surprised and pained. It was so sudden—could not Mrs. Bell defer the journey for a few days? No, the governess sail—every moment's delay was an agony to her; she must set off immediately.

Well, Mrs. Vernon said, if she must leave them, she could only speed her on her way by placing no obstacles before her, and by wishing her a prosperous journey, and an early return. Horace said nothing, though his handsome face clouded at the announcement of his favorite's intended departure, and when she left the room, he followed her out into the hall.

"Must you go, Lucy? Cannot you write, or send some one in your stead?" he asked, anxiously.

"I, only, can attend to this call, Mr. Vernon. It is a duty—a sacred duty!"

"May I inquire how far north this business will take you?"

She hesitated, but at length replied—"Some distance north of Richmond, in Virginia."

"So far! and you think to go alone? It must not be! I object to it, most decidedly!"

"Thank you for your interest—but there is no need of apprehension. I shall be entirely safe, and—"

"Mrs. Bell," he said, with decision, "you have been under my roof nearly fifteen months, and have I ever in that time given you reason to doubt me?"

"No! never!" she returned, warmly.

"Well, then, I am going to accompany you a part of your way; you, your elf, shall set the limit if it be reasonable. I do not wish to pry into your affairs; I do not seek to know what calls you away from us—I trust you in that, for you can do no evil! But you shall not undertake all that long journey alone! So, consider it settled that I am to go with you."

She was in too much haste to set out, to argue with him, and so he had it all his own way. Mrs. Vernon approved her son's plan heartily; kissed both the travelers cordially; wished them God speed, and sent them away. Two days' constant traveling by rail, brought them within the borders of Virginia, and here, Mrs. Bell entrusted her escort to Lucy's care. But he refused, and they went on together to Fredericksburg. She

would permit him to go no farther, and Horace seeing her evident distress at his persistance, forbore to urge his company upon her.

The next day, Mrs. Bell reached Washington City, and at early twilight, she stood beside the bed of Milford Winthrop.

Mr. Winthrop's greeting to his wife partook of shame, surprise, and pleasure. His intense suffering required the constant care of a nurse, and there was no hand so soft as Winifred's; no voice so sweet and soothing. All other attendants were dismissed from his chamber, and his wife took the sole charge—he was grateful and penitent. If she quitted his presence, only for a moment, he was restless and uneasy until her return. Moreover, he wished to confess to some one the many sins that lay in such a burden on his conscience; and to whom could he humble himself so well as to his much-wronged wife? He knew that the sands of his life were falling away—in a little while the glass would be empty; and, in view of the great change that was coming upon him, Milford Winthrop grew tremble and remorseful. Winifred tended him with the utmost patience and gentleness. She hated him no longer; his very helplessness disarmed all feelings but those of compassion. At intervals, as his distress would permit, Mr. Winthrop made Winifred acquainted with the history of his life. The details were given in broken sentences, and intermixed with bitter repinings; so we content ourselves with the essential portions of his relation, for the convenience of the reader.

Milford Winthrop was born in the State of New York, of wealthy parents, and duly destined by his proud father for the law. He was an only son, and the probable heir of a large fortune. At the age of nineteen, he came forth from the halls of New Haven University, a graduate, but, before he commenced the study of his profession, he indulged in two years of travel. He visited the principal points of interest in Europe; returned, a gay, dissolute young aristocrat, to the States, and set off on a Southern tour. At college, he had been very intimate with a young Virginian, named Brandon Lawrence, and by invitation of his friend, his visit South was made. Lawrence resided in the western part of the Old Dominion, on a fine estate of land, which rose higher and higher

at the north until it joined the Blue Ridge. It was a capital place for hunting and fishing, and Lawrence being an orphan, with no relatives in the house, save a maiden aunt who had the supervision of the servants; there was nothing to hinder the young men from enjoying themselves continually in out-of-door sports. Milford, as we have said, was rather a wild youth, and this kind of life suited him exactly. Lawrence, was a noble-hearted young fellow, with a fine flow of spirits, and willing to do any thing to promote the enjoyment of his guest.

But a change came, and the *confîres* were obliged to quit their pioneer sort of life. Lawrence's cousin, Melicent Brandon, a fair, beautiful girl of seventeen, came for a visit to her aunt and cousin. Unlucky hour! Besides her personal attractions, Melicent was possessed of some fortune. She was the promised bride of young Lawrence. He loved her truly and tenderly, with the whole strength of his servile, Southern nature, and she professed to return his affection. But the handsome face of Mr. Winthrop, and his stylish, fascinating manners, attracted the somewhat coquettish girl, and she grew cold and distant toward her cousin. Winthrop was not slow to follow up his advantage. Melicent was handsome, of an old family, and she was an heiress; he admired her beauty, craved her fortune. He basely betrayed the confidence of his friend; proposed an elopement to the giddy girl—and thus consummated his villainy. The erring couple left the house at night; proceeded to a small village some six miles distant, where they were united, and returned to the mansion of the outraged lover before breakfast.

As a matter of course, they were indifferently received. The bride was sent home to her parents at Belmonte; and young Lawrence and the bride-room met in a duel, which resulted in a wound to the former, that kept him confined to his bed for two months. The parents of Melicent were almost heart-broken at the conduct of their daughter. Melicent had been their idol—the shrine about which the tenderest affections of their hearts clung, and the rendering of their child's confidence and love was very bitter. The match between her and her cousin had been long settled, and this sudden breaking off of the engagement brought reproach and scandal upon

the little-known unsullied name of Brandon. Winthrop cared nothing for this; his very recklessness increased the distress of the old parents of his wife. Mr. Brandon fell into a decline. His naturally feeble constitution was broken by the recent stroke—rending death released him. His wife, completely prostrated by the loss of her husband, sank into a rapid consumption, and survived him only a few short months. Thus the whole Brandon property fell into the hands of Milford Winthrop. As for Mr. Lawrence, immediately on his recovery from his wound, he sold his Virginian possessions, discharged his liabilities, and, broken in health, spirits, and fortune, left the country. Whither he went no one knew.

Young Winthrop, by this time, wearied of his pretty, capricious wife; and her wild grief for the loss of her parents, mingled as it was with bitter self-reproach, filled him with intense dissatisfaction. He hated to see a woman forever in tears, he said; he wanted a wife to cheer him and make him happy, not a weeping Nobe. In consequence, poor Melicent was treated with harshness, often with cruelty. This conduct of her husband was not without its effect on the wretched girl. Her mind, never of the strongest type, became filled with one idea, upon which she dwelt day and night—*How to avenge myself upon Winthrop*. Her love had undergone a gradual but sure transformation; and now she abhorred him as entirely as she had once loved him. This hatred with her took the form of a fatal mania. She imagined that if she could deprive her husband of life, she would be doing the world an immense public service; and this had she made absolutely her motto. He pitied her in close confinement, and often allowed her to visit her room but himself. He seemed to have a sort of filial delicacy in her helplessness, and in troubling her with her impotent efforts to do him harm. But he was not immune from her malignant thoughts. He awoke one night to find her standing over him with a large battle-axe, prepared to strike it to his heart. He dashed it aside, and she fled screaming, but not until she had wounded him severely with a pair of scissars which were fastened to her girdle.

After this occurrence, Winthrop took himself judicial in punishing her. However, he did not leave her alone. He

placed her in the care of a servant after his own heart, and himself set out for the East, where he readily obtained a decree of divorce from his wife, on the ground of her insanity. By the decree he was appointed guardian of the unfortunate woman. The property, of course, saving enough for her maintenance, belonged to him according to the statute provided for such cases. After obtaining the divorce, he returned to Bellemonte, disposed of all the Brandon heritage (except the old homestead), including lands, stocks, and slaves.

His father's death, occurring about this time, put him in possession of a princely revenue; and soon after, having studied law at each leisure moment since his departure from college, he commenced the practice of his profession in Boston. Occasionally he visited Virginia to see that his wretched victim was not let loose. With the lapse of years, Melicent's malady increased, and she became periodically insane in reality. Still, she had lucid intervals in which her cries for release were heart-rending. Mr. Winthrop had been in business several years when he first met Winifred Atherton. The girl's beauty pleased him, and her father's wealth was agreeable to his inordinate love of gold. By a crafty appearance of virtue, and many a well-timed act of kindness, he led the unsuspecting old man to place in him unlimited confidence. The result of this scheming is already known. When Mrs. Winthrop had wished to leave Washington for some country retreat, and by a singular coincidence, had fixed on Rappahannock county—the scene of her husband's villainy—he had opposed her plan, because she would be brought into the vicinity of his first wife's prison-house. But, on second thought, he feared to persist in his objections, lest Winifred should suspect him of some hidden motive, and institute investigation which might lead to an exposure of the whole affair.

Therefore he had made a journey into western Virginia, and removed Melicent to an old hunting-lodge on the other side of the mountains, some three or four miles from Woodstock. There he left her in care of two of his young slaves, giving them strict directions not to allow her to quit her room on the peril of their lives.

Melicent was possessed of exceeding artfulness and no small degree of craft. The negroes, believing her too thoroughly

insane to hear or comprehend their conversation, had no scruple in discussing freely their master's affairs in her presence, and through their idle gossip she learned the whole particulars of the expected arrival at Bellemonte, and the preparations which were making. With infinite joy she found that the chamber which was to be appropriated to Mrs. Winthrop was the room which Mr. Brandon, her late father, had used for a cabinet; and behind the chimney of which there was a sliding panel, close down to the floor, that shut up a roomy recess, used by the former master of Bellemonte as a sort of safe for papers of value. This recess communicated with a narrow passage leading under the north wing of the mansion, and terminating in an outlet in the open air, which was closed by a movable stone. Melicent knew this secret, but she had never divulged it to any one; and when she understood that the wife and child of her enemy were to be domiciled in that chamber, she swore in her soul a terrible oath to take the lives of both.

It was night, but she knew the way well. Like a wild deer she flew on, and reached the mouth of the secret passage without hesitation. The great stone gave her ready ingress to the passage. She ascended to the recess, and, removing the sliding panel, gained Winifred's chamber. Mother and child were both sleeping, and both would have fallen sacrifice to the rage of the damsel, but for Winifred's sudden and providential awakening. Once again, on a succeeding night, was her design frustrated in the same manner. The third time she had been partially successful. The presence of Ray had prevented her from hurling the mistress. So she contented herself with smothering Little Willie. The child she proposed to carry to the lake, and kill it at her leisure; but the poor innocent's cries for its mother were so piteous, and its struggling rendered it such a burden, that her patience gave out. She strangled it, and left it dead on the banks of the river. The extraordinary exertions which she had made, and the exposure that she had undergone, threw the miserable woman into a raging fever, which lasted three weeks. At the expiration of that time, her disease took a favorable turn, and for more than a month it was expected that she would ultimately recover. But a relapse occurred, and her fate was decided. Mr. Win-

throp arrived at the lodge the day preceding her death; and his threats wrung from the dying woman a minute confession of her sin. She revealed all, unreservedly; and with the last word trembling on his lips, she expired. Mr. Winthrop saw her decently interred by the side of her parents; gave the negroes, who had served him so faithfully, their freedom, shut up Bellamente, and returned to Maplewood to find his home desolate.

Three weeks before the fatal duel, Branlon Lawrence, the cousin of Melicent, had arrived in America. An accidental meeting had taken place at Washington between the former friends, and some taunting words were exchanged. Mr. Lawrence's hot blood was in no wise cooled by the lapse of time. He challenged Mr. Winthrop to mortal combat. This was the substance of his confession. Winnifield could only compassionate the poor, wasted piece of mortality before her, and commit him, with many prayers, to the mercy of God. Mr. Winthrop grew worse. His wounds healed falsely—inflammation set in, and for six miserable days he suffered unpeakable agony. With vain longings for a little more of the fever called life, and clinging closely to the hand of his wife as though she could keep him back, the spirit of Milford Winthrop passed unto the bar of its Judge.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PAINS OF SICKNESS.

"Though griefs unnumber'd throng thee round,
Still in thy Griefs!
Whose finger marks the seas their bound
And cuts the bounding tides." —MILFORD.

One bright April morning, she set forth on her return to Castle Hill. It was the middle of the month when she reached Columbia—wet, rainy, and extremely muddy. She took a state coach to a little village some ten miles from Castle Hill, and owing to the wretched state of the roads, walked half the distance. In heavy rains, her progress was exceedingly slow. There was

a poor woman, with a blue-eyed little girl, passenger in the coach, and the child seemed suffering with some unknown disease. Winifred, compassionating the stranger, sought her acquaintance, and divided with her the task of holding the child. The mother thought it had the measles, as it had been exposed to them, and the skin had something of that appearance. About half-way to the village before-mentioned, the woman and child left the coach, the latter being unable to ride farther. Winifred performed the remainder of the journey alone. Arrived at the terminus of her stage journey, she engaged a private conveyance to Castle Hill. During the last few days, a strange languor of spirits, and lassitude of body, had oppressed her; and now her temples throbbed hotly with a raging headache. The jolting of the carriage increased the pain almost beyond endurance, and she feared that her strength would not sustain her through the transit. She became incredibly anxious to get on—the horses went at a snail's pace, and the bold swell of Castle Hill was so long in breaking on her view. From the parlor windows Horace Vernon saw the approaching carriage. He hurried out. Winifred had just strength enough to murmur:

"Take me to the house!" when she fell back unconscious, for the first time in her life.

Horace tore open the carriage-door, and, clasping the inanimate form in his arms, bore her into the parlor, and laid her down on a sofa by the fire. With all haste he dispatched a servant for a physician. In a brief space Dr. Upton arrived. He examined the patient critically, made some singular inquiries, and shook his head.

"She has the small-pox, of the most virulent type, I should judge by the fever. I have seldom felt so high a pulse. She has a hard three weeks' work before her—poor girl!"

Horace Vernon's decision bade him to act quickly. He called his mother, gathered together his servants, and bade them prepare for an immediate journey. In two hours' time the entire household with the exception of Horace and an old negro who had had the disease were en their way to a small plantation seven miles up the river. Horace Vernon never felt a more intense thrill of satisfaction than at the moment he knew that Winifred was to be his charge; that to

him she was to owe all the careful tenderness that a sick person requires.

When all danger from contagion was over, Mrs. Vernon and the family came back to Castle Hill, and Winifred was in great danger of being tended to death. As soon as Winifred was strong enough to talk, she confided her whole history to these excellent friends, keeping back only the portion relating to Gerard Middleton. That she could not bring herself to reveal. To the surprise and infinite distress of her friends, Winifred's sense of vision continued to grow less and less, until, in a few weeks, total blindness came upon her. Physicians without number were consulted; they all prophesied that return to health would restore the power of sight; but time passed and brought no favorable issue. It was a terrible trial to this proud, beautiful woman; but, in passing through the deep waters of affliction, she learned to put faith in the goodness of a gracious God. Her very helplessness endeared her to Horace Vernon. It was his privilege to bear her about in his arms, paint to her blinded vision the glory of the summer landscape, to soothe and comfort her as a mother does her well-beloved child.

But what of those other lovers whose fortunes we have thrust upon our readers?

The heart of the young pastor of Windfall grew heavy within him. His love as well as his inclination said to him: "Go to Ruth Mowbray, tell her how strongly and tenderly you love her! Tell her that without her, life will be worse than a blank. Confess all to her, and perhaps her affection will be stronger than her pride." But was it pride on the other hand that said? "No; remain where you are. Let her choose for herself. You do not wish to take for a wife one who has a single thought or feeling reaching out after other shrines. Wait."

It was a beautiful September evening—the universal heart of nature was at peace. But there was one who took no rest. Back and forth in the shrubbery behind the church, walked John Rutherford; his face pale and stormy; his arms folded in the semblance of resignation upon a breast whose wild-beating proclaimed no resignation within. It was near mid-

night, he knew, for the clock on the neighboring steeple had just given the warning. He had hoped against hope for some message from Little Ruth. The hope was dead now, and in its place had come despair.

It was mid-night—the last night that the fair girl would sleep in her native land. So report said, and why should he hesitate to believe it? Only a few more brief hours, and they would be irrevocably separated. The thought was maddening. He turned to enter the house, where he might spend his night of sorrow alone. A hand was laid lightly on his arm. He could face to face with Ruth Mowbray. The white mid-night stars fell upon her brow; her deep, earnest eyes were fixed on his. There was no guile, no shrinking, in those calm, trusting orbs. He took both her hands in his, and said, simply:

"Well, Ruth, I have waited for you."

"And I could not stay away longer, John. I hoped you would come to me, but you did not; and now that I have come, you will not think me bold and forward?"

"No, Lady Ruth."

"Lady Ruth! never call me thus again! I renounce all claim to rank and title, John. There is but one earthly throne where I covet to reign!"

"And that is where?"

"In your heart!"

He caught her rapturously in his arms, weeping over her as we weep over thine returned to us from the dead.

"My own Little Ruth once more! God bless her true, loyal heart! And she will not leave her humble lover for British titles and British gold!"

"Never, John! how could you think so?" she said, seriously and fervently.

"I have empowered Mr. Montague to dispose of all my New Zealand, and transmit to me the proceeds. We can do a grand and glorious with all that money, John. The title I rather wish to my young cousin across the seas, who has a full home share of the heritage. I can afford to give up an empty name, when I have you and your love instead."

Think you John Rutherford was happy? Two months later, there was a wedding in the little church of Windfall.

CHAPTER XV.

DARKNESS AND DAWN.

"Darken'd! this life, henceforth, a shadowy dream,
Blinded and helpless float I down the stream."

THE country rang with the fame of the great French physician, Dr. Gerard. His name reached the secluded home of the Vernons, loaded with praise. He was a singularly successful oculist, who had performed some astonishing operations. Horace Vernon besought Winifred to make the journey to New York, and consult this great operator. Early in October she set forth for the metropolis, accompanied by Horace. They made their journey a long one, for Winifred was still feeble, and arrived at their destination, they took lodgings in a retired boarding-house.

Two days elapsed, during which Winifred rested from her fatigue, and Horace had an interview with Dr. Gerard. On the third day the fair patient, attended by her friend, was ushered into the doctor's presence. Dr. Gerard was standing at a window when his visitors were announced. He turned to greet them, but gave no welcome; his eyes were riveted upon the countenance of the lady. All the color went out from his face, leaving it white and clear as marble.

"This is the lady whom I mentioned to you," Horace said.

"The lady is your wife, I presume?" "No."

Horace blushed painfully.

"No, sir; not my wife, but my very dear friend."

A gleam shot athwart the face of the doctor. He took Winifred gently by the arm, and led her to an easy chair in a shadowy corner of the room.

"Will you trust her with me a little while?" he asked.

"To be sure, if she consents."

"Certainly, Horace; I am not afraid," was her reply.

The doctor passed his hand soothingly over her hair, while an expression of unutterable tenderness dwelt on his face. How gentle he was! How very careful he examined those shrinking eyes! How particular he was not to agitate her! At last—it seemed an age to the impatient waiter—he called Horace, and to his inquiries, replied:

"I can give you no *certain* grounds for hope, but I do not despair. To-morrow, if the lady has the courage, I can decide."

"In what manner?" cried Horace. "By an operation?"

"Yes, and by that only!"

Horace shuddered. "Will it be painful?"

"Not if it should be in any manner successful. If the contrary—I will not deceive you—it will occasion some degree of suffering; perhaps more, perhaps less."

"Dear Winifred! my poor friend! Can you endure it?"

She smiled hopefully. "Yes, Horace, I can bear any thing better than suspense. Try me and see."

"To-morrow, at ten," he said, by way of a reminder, as the carriage bore them away.

The hour arrived. Winifred, pale but firm, sat in the operating-chair. Not even Horace was allowed to remain. Deep silence reigned—neither spoke a word; there was much at stake. Not a nerve of the doctor trembled, his hand was firm as steel; his face was white and stern. It was done at last. A low cry burst from the sufferer's lips. The doctor bent down over her.

"I see! I see, though dimly!" she cried, joyfully. "I see! O God, where do I see? Is this an illusion? Is Gerard Middleton before me?"

His arms reached out to her.

"Winifred, come to me. Come to my heart—at last mine!"

She sprang up: "Gerard!" She buried her face in his bosom.

"Thank God!" was all that he could utter.

She thought not of her restored sight, nothing of poor, anxious Horace waiting without; all the world was swallowed up in the one ill—a Gerard Middleton.

Many days of weakness and pain did Winifred pass in a darkened chamber, forbidden to look even upon that dear face which hovered continually over her. His presence soothed her like a strain of sweet music. Perfect vision came to her never again. She could enjoy the pleasure of viewing near objects, and the companionship of books. For this incalculable favor she was very grateful. When the light of day was admitted into her chamber, Dr. Middleton brought a white-haired man to the sofa where Winifred reclined; and, while Gerard supported the pale woman in his arms, the aged man of God united these two, so long severed, in marriage.

Horace Vernon, his face hidden in the drapery of the window, was the only witness. When the clergyman had pronounced his blessing on the new-made husband and wife and departed, Horace conquered his emotion, and came forth. He took a hand of each:

"May God bless you!" he said, earnestly. "God bless you forever! I am content."

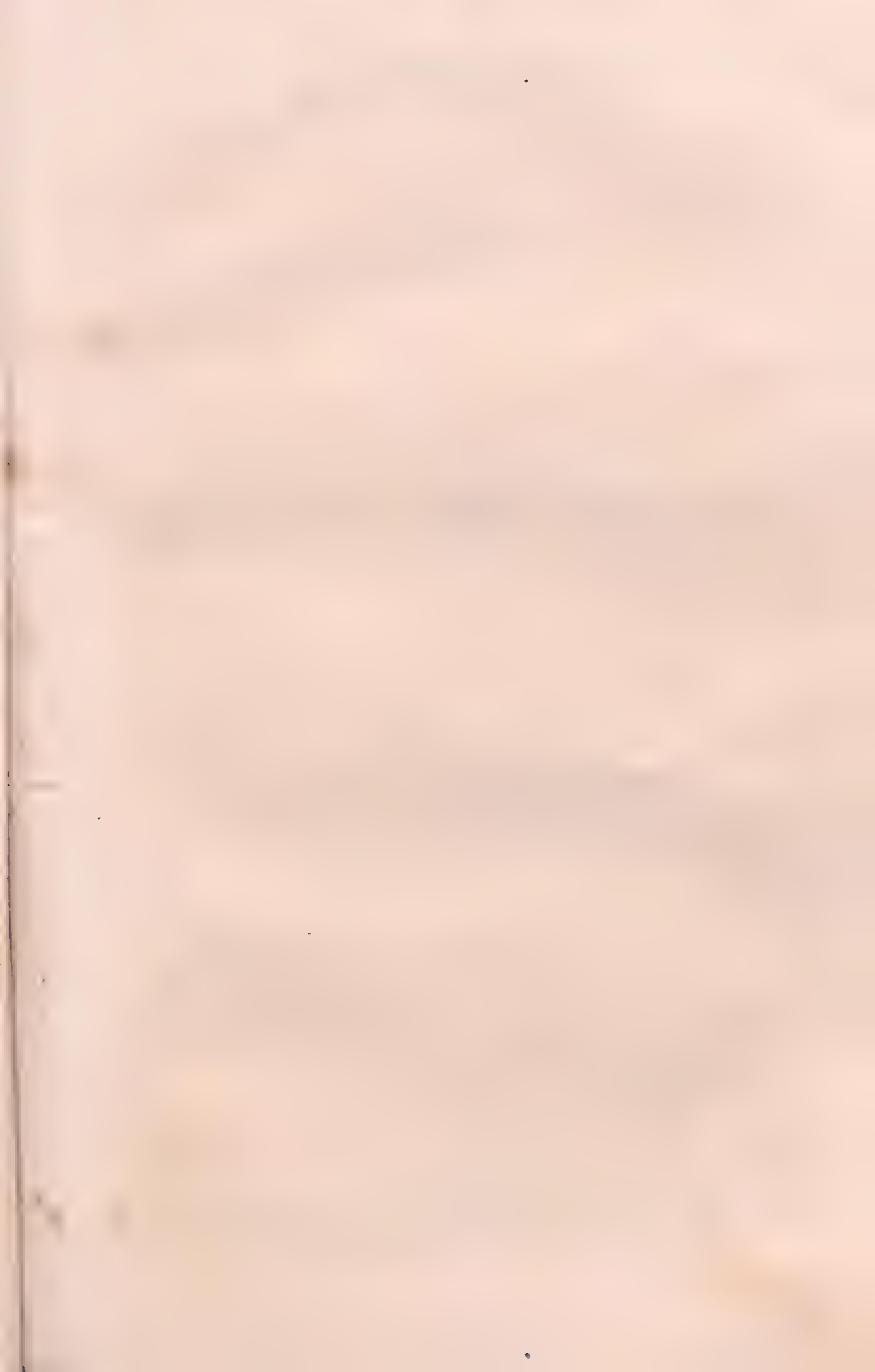
It was not until Winifred had been many weeks a happy wife, and the pair were settled down to their blissful life at Atherton Hall, that she knew the truth and tenderness with which she had been loved through those long years of separation. Gerard Middleton had wandered over Europe, studying his profession here and there; lonely and desolate in heart, but firm in his resolution to win for himself a name that all should speak with praise. He had succeeded. His fame spread over the continent. Gold came to his coffers, and the gratitude of thousands of human beings to his heart! But peace of mind never came! His heart had an unfilled void.

At length he had read in an American paper of the duel, and subsequent death of Milford Winthrop. Newly-awakened hope swelled his bosom, and he sailed for America immediately. He had established himself in New York, and sent faithful agents all over New England to obtain some clue to his beloved Winifred. Providence brought her to his door.

Dear reader, your good heart can imagine the happiness of those two persons who had loved each other so faithfully through years of doubt and despair; and perhaps you can, also, picture to yourself the desolation of Horace Vernon, when once more in the calm of his Southern home.

He never married, but through a long and virtuous life, the poor blessed his name, and men loved and respected him. And he found his greatest joy below, in the long visit, which he paid annually, to his friends at Atherton Hall.

John Rutherford and his wife, living as they did, within a day's ride of the Middleton's, found much pleasure in their society; and Mr. Rutherford felt no jealousy, but only content, when the older friendship between Mrs. Rutherford and Dr. Middleton was renewed.



Entered according to Act of Congress, in the Year 1860, by
BEADLE AND COMPANY,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Southern District of New York.

THE CHILD OF THE PRAIRIE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CITY OF WAKWAKA.

"MERCY! what have we here?"

As he uttered this exclamation, Hugh Felling pulled at his horse's bridle so suddenly that the animal was very nearly thrown upon his haunches, which was fortunate, for, had he taken another step forward, it would have been into the arms of the little child asleep and alone upon the prairie.

The rider remained in his saddle a moment, gazing with astonishment down upon the ground where, half-covered by the tall grass and gorgeous blossoms, this vision had startled him. The infant, not more than a year of age apparently, was a little girl in a white frock, the sleeves of which were rolled up with cords; she had round, rosy limbs, and a sweet face. A few flowers were gripped in one hand, the other was under her cheek; one shoe was on, the other lost, while her little mantle of fine silk was crumpled beneath her feet. As it happened, a red bush lay over her, from some of whose full branches the leaves had dropped into her golden hair.

It was not strange that Mr. Felling was surprised, for he had never diff'rent from my habitation; and his piercing eye, darting its glances in every direction, could detect not the slightest trace of any other human being. He dismounted quickly and took the little one in his arms, who opened

a pair of bright eyes and looked vaguely around, then wistfully into his face.

"Mamma?" she cried, in a plaintive voice, again and again, but she did not otherwise cry, or make those active demonstrations of grief which her sinler dreaded.

Hugh was a man of thirty-three, and ought to have been the father of several such pretty creatures of his own; but he was a bachelor, reserved, taciturn, "unskilled in all the arts and wiles" of soothing infants. He was touched almost to tears by the evident grief and forlornness of the little thing. She seemed to pine with hunger, too. He placed her upon the saddle, while he examined the contents of a brown bag which he had stored with provisions at the last settlement. Dried venison, hard bread—ah, here were some soda-crackers!—sorry food for the baby that was still perhaps dependent upon a mother's bounty for sustenance. But she was too hungry to be particular; she seized upon the cracker, and ate it with a relish, and, after finishing what was given her, looked at her new friend and smiled. That confiding smile went straight to his heart and stirred in it a new sensation.

What was to be done? Of course, he thought not for an instant of abandoning the child to the destruction of solitude; but a baby-girl was not the most desirable companion for a man going into a new country to hunt and fish, and dwell alone wherever his fancy might prompt him to wander. A sudden thought that the parents might also be sleeping somewhere in the vicinity, improbable as it was, occurred to him; and he forthwith haled so hasty that his charge began to cry with fright, when he left off and began soothing her, putting her golden head, with some rather ineffectual efforts at baby-talk.

Mounting his horse again, and keeping her in his arms, he took a circuit of a mile around the spot, hoping to find the lost guardians. But the tiny shoe which met the eye upon her foot, and a blue ribbon-sash hanging up in the thorns of a rose-bush, were all that he discovered.

Something in the color of the blue sash, and something in the color of the baby's eyes, which were a soft, bright, dark hazel, reminded him of a history in his past life which it was a part of his purpose in coming West to forget. He thought

it very ridiculous in himself to connect things so remote from each other, even in fancy; nevertheless, he drew the child closer to his heart and spoke to it in the softest tone of his deep and musical voice.

But what was to be done? The sun was going down behind the earth as into a sea of emerald and jasper. He had meant to pass the prairie before night; but now he thought it best to remain where he was, in the faint hope that some one would come to claim his charge. He had come upon a little brook trickling through the grass in a gully, as he described the circle of a mile, with a little clump of trees to which he could fasten his horse, making it a desirable place upon which to camp out. Here he alighted and began preparations for the night. His little companion, left to herself upon the grass, commenced again her plaintive cry after "mamma, mamma!" Occasionally, in the course of preparing his supper, he would try to lull her away from the one desire which yearned in her born little heart, but in vain. Like a dove roaming in the wilderness, she kept up her sorrowful cry. A few sticks broken from the dead branch of a tree supplied him with materials for a fire, which he kindled upon the ground, the prairie grass being too green to endanger its burning. In a little time he had a cup of tea, a portion of bacon he secured for the child, but she was too much fatigued to be induced to partake of it. His steed, who had quenched his thirst in the stream, cropp'd at his mare the instant she was satisfied with her water about his feet.

By the time the meal of tea, bacon crackers, and dried bread were over, twilight had descended over the scene, and the child had settled her poor, weary little self to sleep. Mr. Fenton took a blanket from his pocket-book, and, laying her gently on the ground, took the coverlet to his horse tentately, where he laid it about them, and, with some of their rags for a pillow, disposed him all for the night.

But after so long upon his conjectures, he had concluded that the mystery might be accounted for by the fact that the Indians had lately been a troublesome, and that there were recent and distinct signs of their having been seen prowling about the prairie for the past few days.

How could it possibly be if some emigrant family had

been attacked by them, the father murdered, the mother borne off into slavery, and the child left to perish! What agony must not that mother at this moment be enduring! Was she young and beautiful? Had she eyes like those of the infant whose soft breath played over his cheek? There had been no traces of any murderous struggle about the spot where he found the babe; but they might have taken it with them some distance and thrown it away at last, because it impeded their flight. Thus mused the traveler until his fancies melted into indistinct visions; and, with only his horse for guard and his gun for defense, he slumbered as sweetly upon the wide plain as he had ever done in the spacious halls of a luxurious civilization.

A kiss upon his cheek and the caress of a soft hand awoke him in the morning; and he dreamed for a blissful moment that he was a married man.

"*Dar Myrtle,*" he said, in a rapturous tone, at which the baby laughed, as if familiar with the name, thereby awakening him to a sense of his situation. Quickly the sweet dream vanished; and, as he sprang to his feet, ready dressed, for a moment a cloud of pain was upon his brow; but it faded presently as he became absorbed in his culinary preparations, while his companion sat upon the blanket and watched his movements with a pretty curiosity.

After breakfast, the two resumed their journey, Mr. Fielding thinking it useless to wait there any longer. The child sat quietly in front of him, seeming to enjoy the ride, and yet musing over some secret grief of her own; but she had no language by which to tell either her grief or sorrow, except her one word, "mamma."

The hot July sun was very endurable to Mr. Fielding, who was almost a world-wide traveler. But he observed that it scorched the lovely face of his companion, who had no bonnet to shelter her from its rays; so he contrived an impromptu shade out of his handkerchief.

It was nearly noon when they reached the city of Wakwaka, which was, for the present, the destination of the travelers. As they left the prairie and ascended a slight elevation which gave them a view of the town and surrounding country, Hugh reined in his horse and gazed for a while upon the

newly prospect. A long, river-like lake, whose bright blue waters lay smooth beneath the cloudless sky, flowed along between high banks of singular beauty. These bluff-like banks stretched back into narrow emerald plains, from which rose again beautiful wooded hills, between which he could catch glimpses of another glorious prairie beyond. At the foot of the eminence upon which he now was, along the south bank as smooth and fair as a terrace, lay the fifty houses which composed the present city of Wakwaka. About half of these were of canvas, gleaming whitely in the sunlight; the rest were of boards put roughly together, and three or four brick buildings which did not seem completed. The fact is, this ambitious and flourishing town had not been in existence six months before, its exact age being five months and one week. The virgin beauty of the lake-shore was already defaced by a dock, from which a little steamboat had just pulled cheerily away, leaving the group of men who had gathered at the landing to look after her a few moments, and then turn again to their different employments.

Mr. Fielding spurred up his horse and rode down along the street, taking, as he passed along with his gun on his shoulder and a baby in his arms, the place of the departed steamer in the interest and curiosity of the people.

It is difficult if any in the motley crowd who had gathered from various impulses of self-interest in that new city, could more truly be called adventurers than the couple who now made their way to the principal and in truth the only hotel. It was Heathfield's business to seek adventure; and, as for the little girl, she, also, by some strange and mysterious fortune, had been cast into a unique situation which promised only singular experiences.

The theater chosen for her first appearance in her new parts was but rather appropriate. It was a stage upon which almost any new drama might be performed with unprecedented success. The cloth houses, the sound of hammers, the flag flying high from the top of the one-story hotel, the rattle of an omnibus, the distant hills, the lovely lake, the flowers and birds growing upon the very streets of the city, formed no less strange a jumble of objects than her life might form of events.

The arrival of a new-comer, though of constant occurrence, was still a matter of intense interest to the dwellers in Wak-waka; and the crowd upon the landing proceeded across the way and gathered about the front of the hotel to welcome with inquisitive eyes the approach of the strangers.

Hugh was not a man to be embarrassed even by the novel charge held so gently in his arm. One glance upon the group of shrewd, speculative, yet cool faces about him, revealed to him the elements upon which the rapidity of Western civilization depends.

He smiled slightly as he glanced at the house built of rough boards with canvas wings, like some strange, unfeathered bird just settled from a flight, and thought of how he had often rested beneath the shadow of the Coliseum.

"Have our new house done next week—that brick yonder," said the landlord, who already had his horse by the bridle, as he detected the smile.

"Have you any women in the house?" asked Hugh.

"Lots of them," was the ready response.

"Well, take this child in, and have them provide some bread-and-milk for her, if you please."

The curiosity expressed in the neighboring faces gave place to a look of admiration as he took his handkerchief from the head of the little girl. The extreme beauty of her infant countenance delighted even the coarsest in the crowd. Her golden hair curled up in short, shimmering ringlets, which hung like a garland about her head, the crown of her exquisite loveliness. She shrank and clung to her protector when the landlord went to take her; but when Hugh asked her to go, she obeyed. A woman, who had been looking from a window, was already at the door to take her within and minister to her comfort.

Mr. Fielding, as he dismounted, found himself in a group of men, most of them intelligent, many educated, all ready to ask after the world they had left, and to give all the information desired about their new home and its prospects. He soon related the story of the child's being found by him; and it was unanimously concluded that its parents had fallen a prey to some ravenous Indians who did not dare open warfare, but sometimes attacked unprotected emigrants. Great

pity and interest were felt; and twenty fiery hearts blazed up with a determination to hunt out and punish the marauders, if any trace of them could be found. The next thing proposed was that each man present should subscribe a sum toward the proper support and education of the Child of the Prostitute. As one imaginative person proposed she should be called; and several hundred dollars were offered on the spot. But Mr. Fielding, with many thanks for their generosity, told them that, although he was, and always expected to be, a bachelor, and had hitherto regarded children as rather needless and injudicious intruders upon people's time and comfort, yet, as Providence had thrown this one in his way, and he was very well able to provide for her, and already loved the innocent little creature, he should himself see that she was well taken care of.

A low cheer of approbation broke from some of the young men; and they gathered about the windows and doors to get another peep at the pretty heroine who was being lionized by all the females of the house.

Hugh only wished to shake the dust of travel off him, and partake of the dinner waiting upon a long table in the canvas hall-chall, before he went to inquire after his charge. She had given her bread and milk, and was sitting in her nurse's cap very patiently, making no trouble, but with two great eyes glittering upon her eyelids, ready to fall. When she saw Hugh, she leaped, and came eagerly to his arms. It was evident that she was a delicate flower, to be guarded against the sunshines and too severe storms. She seemed to Hugh to deserve much attention from strangers, and clung to him with an affection which made him feel how impossible it was for him to abandon her.

"What are you going to name her?" asked Hugh.

"I know I shall call her Myrtle," replied Hugh.

"What makes you give her such an out-of-the-way name as that?" said Hugh. "Mary would be much more to my mind."

"It was the name of a friend of mine," he answered; "and, besides, the meaning of Myrtle is 'Joy'—a pretty meaning for a child's or a woman's name; though the name does not always tally with the character," he added, with a sigh.

"As true as I am born," said the first speaker, "if the initial on the clasp of her corals is not 'M'! But, of course, her name must have been Mary."

"Of course it was," added the second.

"I think Myrtle will be very pretty," said a sweet voice in the corner.

Hugh looked that way.

"Do you know, madam," he inquired, "where I could find some kind woman who would take care of her a few days until I get my plans somewhat arranged? She shall be well rewarded."

"I will take her with pleasure, and wish no reward, of course. She will be company for me," answered the lady.

With this pleasant person, who was the young bride of a lawyer who had come out to take advantage of the making of a new country, and whose winning ways were well suited to soothe the timid child, Mr. Fielding left his little Myrtle.

CHAPTER II.

MR. FIELDING'S ESTABLISHMENT.

A week from thence Mr. Fielding was settled to his heart's content. He had succeeded in purchasing three hundred acres lying along the shores of the lake, and including some of its most romantic portions, at a distance of not more than two miles from the city. It was not his intention to live in any community, unless it were a community of pheasants, partridges, deer, and wild-turkeys; and, if it had not been for his finding of baby Myrtle, he would have camped out until cold weather, making excursions of several days' length.

It was the fresh and wonderful loveliness of the pure water and its surrounding scenery, looking as if here for untold years nature had made one of her sweetest retiring-places, that induced him to stop near Wakwaka.

In a sheltered nook, protected from any stray winds which might prove too strong for it, and overlooking the water at its most beautiful point, he erected his canvas house. The opposite shore was lined with a woody bank, a hill peering over its shoulder in the distance; and he had but to walk a few steps from the door to look down one of the loveliest vistas in the world of prairie land, broken by clumps of trees, and glistening for a time with a silvery edge of water.

Mr. Fielding was a little tinged with misanthropy—as much so as a man of his middle dignity and generosity of character could be—and there may have been some very good reason for it. Certainly he did not look like a person to whom misery can by nature or inheritance.

If he had intended to live alone; but his finding of that stray infant in the woods had altered his determination. So he built two rooms to his impromptu house, one of which was occupied by a small lady who had consented to take charge of his domestic affairs, including baby Myrtle.

For a man who had criticised the palaces of the Old World, his apartment could not be said to display that love of beauty which was one of the strong elements of his character. A baleful—whose posts, so far from being polished by the hand of art, wore still the shining bark with which nature had dressed them—was fitted to receive the buffalo-skin and blankets heaped upon it. A shot-gun and light rifle hung upon the wall, except when out with their owner; and the traps of a hunter and the clothes of a gentleman filled the little room indiscriminately. But, upon a home-made table in a corner, some glimpses of a finer taste were apparent. Perhaps a dozen favorite books of poetry and philosophy were piled upon it, a flute lay by their side, and a brown stone mug in the center was never without its bouquet of wild-flowers.

The other half of the house was kitchen and parlor; and nobody would guess that it was bedroom also, during the night, did they not notice a little frame with blankets inside turned up snugly against the wall in the corner furthest from the stove.

"I declare, Mrs. Murgins, this is really delightful!" said Mr. Fiddlin, in his earnest, pleasant way, the first evening they sat down to tea.

A cool wind blew over the lake and in at the door; woodland and water glowed in the sunset light; and he could see it all from his place at the table.

A white cloth was on the board, and a brace of pheasant, and fish from the lake, and golden corn pone upon that; and upon one side sat the smart old lady, pouring tea into two little cups of blue earthenware, her clean cap on, and her eyes studious and satisfied glances at the perfection with which the fish was "done brown." And, loveliest sight of all, at the other side, in a high chair, bought in the city, with her bowl of bread and milk before her, sat the beautiful baby Myrtle, smiling over at her friend, and shedding sunshine over the place by her bright, innocent countenance.

Mrs. Murgins probably thought that her companion referred entirely to the looks of the dishes before him.

"I am glad if you like my cooking, Mr. Fiddlin'; I've generally been reckoned a purty good hand at it," she answered, complacently.

"I do like your cooking," he responded, emphatically, as he helped him off to the boat. "And I like the quiet of this plantation; so serene, so beautiful. If one had only traveled to Savoy or Italy in search of it, he would go crazy with rapture; but, as it is only American, I suppose it can not be compared. I think I shall like this way of living very much, Mrs. Muggins; and, if you and Myrtle like it as well as I, I think we shall get along admirably."

"Not only I'll complain of you, if they don't," said his housekeeper. "You must feel 'em almost as if you was the father of that child; and a beauty she be, poor thing! She's no more trouble than nothing. The ladies at the tavern made her plenty of clothes, and I've only to take care of them. Did you say you had never been married, Mr. Fieldin'?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"I do, too, that's cur'us! Such a likely man too."

"I suppose that I ought to be married," was the light reply; "but, with you to attend to my comfort, and this little creature here to care for, I think I must get excused."

"Did you ever meet with a disappointment?" asked Mrs. Muggins.

The gentleman took down suddenly into his cup and saucer, and started his tea.

"Perhaps," he answered. "What if I had?"

"Nothing; only I don't think you'd deserve it. I guess I as much when I heard you a playin' on that fife before supper—it sounded so heart-broken like."

"Quite a compliment to my playing; but I assure you I can't find a heart-broken. There is not a sounder-hearted man in Walkerville. And remember, Mrs. Muggins, I have not confessed to a disappointment."

So saying, having finished his tea, he took Myrtle in his arms, and went and sat in the door of his own room.

"The girl must have been a fool who cheated him," murmured Mrs. Muggins, as she washed up the tea-things; "but as like as not she died."

In the mean time, Heath set Myrtle on his knee, taking her closely, and trying to learn her to say some words. A glinting in her dark eyes of a peculiar, smiling sort, soothed him, as if once more he gazed into the eyes

of an older Myrtle whom he had tried to banish from his thoughts for five long years :

“But still her footsteps in the passage,
Her blushes at the door,
Her timid words of maiden welcome
Come back to him once more.”

The spell of memory was irresistible. He looked earnestly into the face of the child, covered her forehead with kisses, and, drawing her golden head to his bosom, sang her softly to sleep, while he abandoned himself to the past, which returned to him as if it were of yesterday. Again Myrtle Vail, the girl of eighteen, stood before him, the blush upon her fair cheek creeping down upon the snowy neck until it lost itself in the shadow of her brown tresses, while her head was slightly bent, and her red lip trembled as she said the word which assured him that he had not bestowed his passionate, but pure and earnest admiration in vain. Again he felt the trembling of the hand he had ventured to prison in his own, and again he won the timid but soulful glance of those sweet eyes as he tempted them to search his.

Again he endured the bitter sorrow of parting with her, as necessary business called him to Europe for a space of nearly two years; and again he endured the far bitterer agony of a return just in time to see her give her hand to a man in every way his inferior—younger, handsomer, perhaps, in an effeminate beauty, but vain, immature, carelessly educated, unfit to call forth the riches of the spirit which he had dreamed floated beneath the surface in Myrtle's gentle character. Again he saw the pallor overspread her face, as, looking up, after pronouncing the vows which made her recitant to him, she cast his eyes, and thus knew, for the first time, that he had returned.

Here he roused himself from his thoughts. He cared not to trace his abrupt departure from that place and his subsequent restless wanderings.

“Here I shall find peace, if not happiness,” he murmured. His own voice called him back to the present. Myrtle was asleep upon his breast, and the night air was blowing almost too chilly upon her.

CHAPTER III.

MR. FIELDING'S HABITS AND VISITORS.

Jesiah's girl, which sprang up and flourished in a night, was rivalled by the city of Wakwaka. Every time Mr. Fielding went to town he was surprised by the improvements so rapidly made. Building materials could not be furnished in the abundance required; and, while good-looking brick stores were going up, and the solid stone foundation for a fine courthouse being laid, cloth houses were still the fashion, and considered very cool and airy summer residences by the most aristocratic.

Foresight was preparing, however, for the winter, as fast as lumber could be obtained, or clay turned into brick, residences more substantial. It was wonderful how the future prospect of elegant, perhaps palatial, mansions, upon the wide and beautifully situated lots they occupied, reconciled delicate ladies, who had once been extremely fastidious, to brave the horrors of canvas and two rooms and all the hardships of a new settlement. Not such hardships as the sturdy pioneers endure who break up the wild prairie and cause it to blossom like a rose; for Wakwaka was in daily communication with one of the great arteries of travel of the country, and there was no want of favor or kindness, nor privation of any luxuries, except those of elegant furniture and spacious abodes.

"All these we shall have very soon," said the ladies of Wakwaka, as they laughed at their little trials, or consoled with each other upon the absence of accustomed comforts.

And still, attracted by the growing fame of the new city, adventurers came hurrying in from every boat: men of broken-down fortunes; youths of courage and energy, too hopeful and fiery to await the slower chances of an old-settled country; some already rich speculators; and many hardy sons of toil, who had taken up the beautiful prairie-land and turned it in-

to productive farms without cost or labor more than they would have had to give to cultivate land in most places.

All this hurry, and growth, and strangeness, and joyful expectations produced an excitement unknown and unappreciated where the crust of selfishness and conventionality has hardened. Men were met with hearty grasps of the hand, which gave their hearts as much cheer as it gave their fingers pain. Not that human nature was acted upon by the beautiful influences of Wakwaka to become otherwise than as it always is; selfishness was rampant, no doubt, in many minds, shrewd, cool, and calculating; but large prospects of rapid gains and the absence of old-time formalities had, for a season at least, expanded the hearts of her people.

And it can not be said but that a constant reminder of the lavish generosity and beauty of nature—silently spoken by her blooming prairies rolling one after another into almost infinite distance, her wool-crowned hills, and free, magnificent waters—had some effect upon the souls of those who enjoyed this profusion of her riches.

September, October, and November drifted by in a long, unbroken shower of golden sunshine, giving the new settlers good time to prepare for winter.

Mr. Fielding was not altogether idle during that time. He had his canvas house boarded up, and many little comforts added to it; and sent East for a store of books with which to beguile the winter evenings.

Hunting and fishing were his principal occupations.

Such serene enjoyment had not been his for several years as through that glorious autumn. He was a lover of the beautiful in nature as well as in art. While his physical powers were exercised and invigorated by his out-of-doors life, his spiritual nature was fed with the very honey of existence. Cloudless skies, serene and deep, hung over water and land; rich purple mists hung at morning around the horizon, but at mid-day it was changed to a belt of gold; every few days the prairies changed their hues, now gorgeous with crimson, and anon with yellow, and again with scarlet flowers. It was not so much to startle the partridge out of the long grass, or to chase the deer to the cover of the wood, that he slung his gun upon his shoulder, although he kept the horn well supplied

with the chieftain of game, as it was to be out alone in the midst of boundless and ever-varying beauty, free to dream and to think, with nothing in life of body and liberty of soul.

Sometimes his excursions were several days in length; but a yearning after the sweet smile and prattle of little Myrtle always brought him home sooner than he had anticipated.

Her joyous cry, as she bounded to his arms, was his reward; and he fully believed the declaration of Mrs. Margins that the child always "paled and pined" in his absence.

She had learned to call him "Papa;" and Mr. Fielding sometimes looked about in his solitude while fancying the assistance of his friends in various parts of the world—who had given him up as an incorrigible bachelor, which he intended still to remain—could they have a peep at him in his cell, with his old lady housekeeper and his adopted daughter. But he was happier than he had been in their frivolous society.

Prairie-flies, glimmering in the distance, and sweeping near, illuminating the nights with flamel radiance, began to be a feature of the scenery, after the November frosts had parched the grass to the like hues of a rustling sea of jasper.

Mr. Fielding had an imagination which was not proof against sylvan and novelty combined; and, upon one occasion, when the early night found him wandering over a hill with his gun in his hand, and one of those fires sprang from a distant wood and ran over the prairie until extinguished by contact with the lower edge of the lake, he was guilty of some lines like these:—

THE RED HUNTERS.

Out of the wood at midnight
The swallows flattered me;
The prairie was their racing-course;
The horses were their game;
The steeds were of glittering silver,
The drivers were of fine and gold;
Driven by the panting winds of heaven
Their shining chariots roll'd.

Over that level racing-course—
Oh, what a strife was there!
What a shouting! what a threatening cry!
What a murmur upon the air!

Their garments over the glowing wheels
 Stream'd backward red and far.
 They floated their purple banners
 In the face of each pale star.

Under their tread the autumn flowers
 By millions withering lay ;
 Poor things that from those golden wheels
 Could nowhere shrink away !
 Close and crashing together
 The envious chariots roll'd ;
 While anon, before his fellows
 Leap'd out some hunter bold.

Their black hair, thick and lowering
 Above their wild eyes hung,
 And about their frowning foreheads
 Like wreaths of nightshade clung.
 "The bisons, lo, the bisons!"
 They cried and answer'd back.
 The frighten'd creatures stood aghast
 To see them on their track.

With a weary, lumbering swiftness
 They seek the river's side,
 Driven by those hunters from their sleep
 Into its chilling tide.
 Some face the foe, with anguish
 Dilating their mute eyes,
 Till the spears of silver strike them low,
 And dead each suppliant lies.

Now, by the brightening river,
 The red hunters stand at bay —
 Vain their appalling splendor —
 The water shields their prey.
 Into its waves with basted rage
 They leap in death's despite —
 The golden wheels roll roaring in,
 Leaving the wither'd night.

While Mr. Fielding was copying this effusion the next afternoon, some ladies called to see him; or rather they said they had come to see Myrtle; but, when young women walk two miles to call at a house where there is a pretty child and a rich and handsome old bachelor, people are at liberty to draw their own conclusions as to which is the greater attraction. For appearance's sake, however, they praised and petted the little creature, who was pleasing enough to give a coloring to all their admiration; and did not fail to pay compliments to Mrs. Muggins for the way in which she took care of her.

Smelvins an' eaks they had for her, too, which delighted her at the time, and made her ill afterward.

It is a strange fact, that when a gentleman seems to shun their society, and especially with a shade of melancholy about his unselfishness, the ladies are certain to be infatuated with him; and vice versa. Whether this arises from sympathy, or a wish to prove one's own attractions and powers upon so innocent a subject, or from the interest which always clings to anything mysterious, or from all three combined, who shall say? These four young women could any of them have been surrounded by admirers, and each had her choice out of two or three, without troubling herself to walk out to Mr. Fielding's upon the small chance of attracting his attention. For, as yet, the men were largely in advance, in point of numbers, of the female population of Wakwaka; and, what was better, they were all ready, or nearly ready, to provide for a wife; and thus the girls were in no danger of that forlorn fate which sometimes overtakes spinsters in the older States, where the chances of getting a living are fewer, and from whence all the enterprising young maidens have gone West.

It may have been the beauty of the afternoon and the beauty of the lady, after all, which led them so far.

"I am so full of children; and this is such a sweet little thing!" cried Miss Minnie Greggs, looking up to the gentleman confidentially, and then kissing pretty Myrtle so suggestively; after which she turned back her jetty ringlets, and looked up again for sympathy.

Mr. Fielding gazed into her saucy black eyes. He could not help admiring the wills which he understood.

"She is very lovely in all regards," he said, "and becomes me better and all the time. I used to think children were hideous; but I am glad of the chance which threw this one in my path. She has become my morning star."

"Don't you think she will need some other feminine influence than either her mother, or than that of Mrs. Muggins?" said Mr. Fielding, suddenly, in too low a tone for the old woman's ears. "Some one who will take the place of Mrs. Bluebird—who looks and tones would—"

"Remember those of my friend, Miss Bluebird," broke in Minnie Greggs, with the gravity of the wickedest mischief.

"How can you! I declare! I shall be offended with you," cried that lady, blushing, while the others laughed.

Hugh did not laugh: some stern thought seemed to have crossed his genial humor. "No, Miss Bluebird," he answered, almost severely, "I want no influences except those of nature, and of music, and well-chosen books about this child, with such sentiments of truth and fidelity, purity and earnestness of heart, as I can instill into her. She shall be raised outside of society. She shall not be taught vanity and artifice; and then, if she fails in being what I desire, I shall believe that Mother Eve never entirely deserts her children."

For a few moments he was rather taciturn. Miss Minnie rallied from a remark she was afraid was intended as rather personal, and changed the subject.

"Have you heard the news, Mr. Fielding? You have not! You know those horrible Indians that we have all been so afraid of?"

"We?" inquired a fearless-looking girl, who was evidently ready for almost any kind of an impromptu adventure.

"Well, everybody else but you, then—even the men. We are going to have a regiment stationed near us this winter to keep the Indians at a distance. Just think of it—won't it be delightful? The officers will be apt to be such pleasant men, you know. And we shall have balls, of course!"

"I had been teasing mother to send me back to our old home for the winter, until I heard of this," said the other girl of the group; "but now I am quite content to stay."

"I wonder why it is that the girls always have such a passion for an epaulet on a man's shoulder," said Mr. Fielding, recovering his equanimity. "The glitter of an officer's insignia will make any man irresistible."

"Because we like our opposites; and soldiers are supposed to be brave as we are weak. We like to be defended," said Miss Bluebird.

"I do not like officers half as well as farmers or hunters," said the brave Miss Thomas, with a saucy glance at Hugh.

"By the way," suddenly exclaimed Minnie Greengs, "I had almost forgotten to tell you what Lieutenant S. told me, last evening, about a party who were taken by the Indians. I was telling him about you and little Myrtle. You know the

man who went off from home never found any traces of the savages. But the Lieutenant says that about that time an Indian party of the Indians were known to have made a descent upon two emigrant wagons in the night where they had camped at the edge of a prairie. The helpless families were not afraid of any danger, for the savages had not been troubled for a long time, and they supposed their nearness to a settlement was sufficient security. They murdered the two men, killed the horses to the wagons, and drove off with the women and children until they reached the cover of a deep forest, where they left the wagons, and tying the women to the animals, hurried them off to some secret retreat of theirs far away to the left. The child may have been thrown aside as burdensome, or dropped by the mother in attempting to effect her own escape."

"Were the names of these unfortunate persons known?" asked Mr. Fiddling, with great interest.

"The elder of the two men was called Parker, I believe, as is related at the last village they stopped at. The other was Samuel Lippincott; and his wife, they said, was young and very beautiful."

"Great Heaven!"

He laid his hand upon his bosom as death, and sank upon his chair.

"Did you know them?" asked Hall, in a startled tone.

"I am quite sure they are the same," he said, after some moments' silent silence. "Poor Myrtle, I have I named the child! I believed I gave thee thy mother's name?"

"What does the Lieutenant think has become of the female captives? Has no attempt been made to rescue them?"

"My people have been organized. An Indian has been sent to the Indians, that they were number 1 when it was time to get off to another country away."

"Captain, it is hard to corroborate his account. There is no doubt that the awful story is true."

"Poor Captain! How faith thou art doubly my own," said Hall, as he took the child in his arms. He was evidently anxious, with impatience, that the young lassies dare not call him by his name, but rather I think it in silence.

How much Mr. Fiddling suffered that night will be known only to himself and Heaven. The next day he went to

Wakwaka and sought out the officer who had communicated the story to Miss Greys. The substance of the story was corroborated by him; but he said he doubted if the name of the younger couple was Sherwood. He had been told since that it was Smith.

But there was something in Myrtle's eyes which convinced him that she was the child of the Myrtle whom once he had thought to call his own. Her falsehood was forgotten now—only her fearful and untimely fate was thought of.

To make assurance doubly sure, he wrote back to the East to her friends to inquire if she and her husband had emigrated to the West, and learned, in a mournful letter from a relative, that they had started for that very city of Wakwaka, and had not been heard from since.

Mr. Fielding did not tell them that he had a child supposed to be the daughter of Myrtle. As the father and mother of the young wife were neither of them living, he thought he had as good a claim to her as any one now left; and he felt that he could not resign her, at least for the present. Besides, he had the benefit of a doubt as to whether they had really any claims to this mysterious Child of the Prairie.

CHAPTER IV MIRTLE FIELDING'S EDUCATION.

WINTON came for the first time upon the city of Wakwaka. The lake was frozen; the little steamer was safe at her moorings, laid up for the season; the everlasting sound of the putting up of logs was almost at an end; the communication with other parts of the world was cut off, save by wagon conveyance; the daily mail became a weekly one; and the citizens and speculators ceased to talk about wild land and city improvements, and turned to considering the prospect of a railroad which should connect them with the East, and be feasible all the year round.

Railroad speculations could not engross their minds entirely, and in their leisure hours they were ready for any kind of company which could be improvised. The young girls talked about the fort and the officers through the day, and dressed for dances in the evening. They had sleigh-rides and skating-parties, and weddings were not entirely wanting. Every week they had a ball at the new brick hotel, the Wakwaka Hall. The most aristocratic attended these dances (of course they had an aristocracy, though it was not as yet clearly defined), and usually found off with the sharp palings of conversation, regular attention from all respectable persons present, while a general spirit of freshness and vivacity prevailed, which made all dances sources of merriment, and more than a general pleasure than all the balls that Mrs. Petitioner ever gave.

If the girls showed too decided a partiality for officers' uniforms, the young city lads bore it with commendable indifference, and took their turnless revenge all in good time.

Mr. Fielding was the gentleman *par excellence*, however: first, he was handsome; second, he was rich; third, he was fleet; fourth, dandified; fifth, mysterious; sixth, he was resourceful; seventh, brilliant.

not a marrying man—six good reasons why he should be sought after. He was not perfect, although the ladies called him so; and therefore he must be excused for the small portion of his sex's vanity which he inherited, which made him not insensible to the curiosity he piqued and the favorable impressions he made. This consciousness upon the part of the men is very detestable, and exists usually with no good grounds to found it upon; but in his case there was much to command attention, and he really received it with dignity, and nourished his self-complacency but very little upon it.

He could not have been called a gloomy man; and perhaps even the melancholy the ladies invested him with was half in their imaginations; though certainly during the first of the season there was the pallor of suppressed sorrow upon his brow. But his nature was a mingling of sunny geniality with a deep reserve; the warmth breaking out when subjects of common interest, such as music, beauty, or art, were being discussed, and the reserve following upon any reference to himself personally.

The life he now lived suited him well. He had the advantages of solitude and society both. When in town, he was popular and made a favorite; when out in his own little cabin, he was away from the world of action as completely as if buried in the cell of a hermit. He would have pined for those things which make a city enviable to a gifted mind—rich minds, glorious pictures, works of art and luxury; but, for the present, nature was all there, and more to a mind saturated with too much living. And then the novelty of playing father to a little girl! It was a very pleasant family circle, that of his home. Mrs. Murgins was as tidy as she was talkative; though he had a way of checking an excess of the latter virtue when it became wearisome. She kept little Myrtle as neat and beautiful as a lily, so that the fastidious bachelor could call her to his knee without fear of offence from a delicate or sensitive garment. The child was more than the amusement of his idle hours. He took almost a mother's interest in the unfolding of the pure flower of her soul, the new developments of her mind, and the rapid expansion of her physical powers. And, while he delighted to teach her, she also taught him—many lessons of guileless faith, and the simplicity

of innocence, and the loveliness of nature as God made it in its freshness.

So, with books and his flute, hunting, and his visits to town, the winter passed by. He stood up as groom-man at the wedding of pretty Minnie Griggs with the young Lieutenant. Miss Bluebird avowed that he seemed preyed upon by some grief during the evening; but no one else felt assured of it; and she could not win him to unbosom his concealed trouble; in which, "like a worm 'f the br'f," fed on his heart—to her sympathy. So, out of revenge, she shortly after married a dry-goods merchant, who, at this present writing, is spoken of as one of the founders of Wakwaka, and who has retired to a residence upon the banks of the lake, adjoining Mr. Fitch's three hundred acres, and who can count himself worth two hundred thousand in Wakwaka railroad stock, and one hundred thousand in town lots, besides his pretty villa and grounds where he resides.

The spring came, and other summers and winters passed, and still Hugh Fitch lived in his cabin, hunted, fished, read, dreamt, and enjoyed, and seemed to change in nothing, for the years set kindly upon him. He was content to be a kind of master to his neighbors, and to do as he pleased. The city grew and thrived apace; and, as the banks of the lake became thronged with beautiful residences, many a gaudy barge was built out to induce him to part with his precious bit of land. But he was not to be tempted. Not an acre would he part with. "Silly," said some. "Holding out for an enormous price," said others. "No eye for beauty—nothing. A woman such an idiot to run wild! I wish I had her," said many a wealthy person of cultivated ideas, who coveted his possessions.

Despite of all he had his own way about it. He did not even "play up" the country, except here and there to plant a tree or two, or, to have deadging timber taken off, and some small field stretches kept clear for the strawberries and raspberries, and the underbrush cleared from a grove of chestnut trees which had fallen down to the water's-edge at one picturesque point.

There was only another room added to his cabin, which was made necessary by the accumulation of books, pictures,

and the like, which he often sent East for. This new room, out of respect for Myrtle, was prettily carpeted, and had a little rocking-chair, and flower-stand, and some other handsome things in it. In the mean time, while the city was growing large, and Mrs. Muggins growing old, and every thing advancing or retarding, of course little Myrtle did not stand still. A will-o'-the-wisp or a butterfly would have stood still sooner than she. She grew in size, in health, and in beauty. The nature which threatened at first too great a degree of sensitiveness and fear, hardened and grew fearless in the fresh air and unrestrained life of her country home. In the warm weather, she, like her "papa," almost lived out-of-doors. She would ramble hours by his side, and then curl down and sleep with her head on his knee, while he read or dreamed beneath the shade of a tree or down by the water's edge on a cool shadowed rock. He taught her the name and character of all the flowers of the field and trees of the forest, so that at six years of age she was a miniature botany, bound, as it were, in rose leaves. He taught her, too, of the rocks, and sands, and waters, so that, as her mind grew, every thing, however humble, had an interest to her, and the earth was a great "curiosity-shop," much more strange and delightful, more absorbing to her fancy than the gaudy shops of the towns in which children are taught what to covet and admire.

One favorite place she had for spending her time when Hugh was away: a kind of fairy bower, made by an elm whose branches upon one side held up a beautiful wild flowering vine, while upon the other was a rose-bush always in blossom through the long summer. The open front looked upon the lake, and a moss-covered stone made a cushioned seat fit for a queen. The grass about it was clean, fine, and short, and full of violets.

She never went to school; but was sometimes taken to town to visit with other children, and had, in return, youthful guests come to see her in the pleasant weather.

But she was educated, even in book education. Hugh patiently taught her her alphabet and to read. After that it was only necessary for her to know that he desired her to study any book he put into her hands, and her love gave the impulse which made acquirement easy.

Thus time glided on for nine years. Nine years!—a long time; and Mrs. Muggins was growing older and feebler all this time; and one day she was taken sick, and soon she died. Myrtle grieved herself ill, and Mr. Fielding did not disdain to drop a tear upon her humble grave, for she had been a faithful servant and very kind to his darling little girl.

He was obliged to be his own housekeeper for some time, for another Mrs. Muggins was not easily to be found. When she saw him flitting about in a man's awkward way, little Myrtle's womanly instincts were aroused, and she put away her at first overwhelming grief to try and aid him. He would not have believed those slender little hands could do so much. She could lay the cloth, and sweep, dust, and brush; wash bread, and pour out tea; and his room she took pride in keeping in exquisite order.

He used to watch her flitting about like a fairy put to earthly tasks, her feet moving as if to some inward music, and her golden hair encircling her in a halo of mystic brightness. The careful gravity, the pretty air of business newly put on, were bewitching to him.

"Well, Myrtle, I think I had better not get anybody to help us; you make such a nice little maid," he would say.

"I like to help you very much, papa; but what will you do when it comes washing, ironing, and churning days?"

"Sure enough. We are not equal to all emergencies, are we, daughter?"

Six months of time, a woman was found to take the place of the departed. She was not of as quiet and nice a mold as the late, and respected Mrs. Muggins. Mr. Fielding did not like her to preside at his table; and so little lady Myrtle never gave up her place at the head of the tea-things.

After this did not go on as systematically as of old. Many household tasks fell to the child which Mrs. Muggins used to perform; but, happily, she liked them.

Mr. Fielding dreaded a change. He had become so accustomed to the pleasant routine of his monotonous life that he shrank from the thought of its being in any manner disturbed. But a change came.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. JONES'S NEPHEW.

Mr. FIELDING received word which made it absolutely indispensable that he should go East and attend to his long-neglected interests there. What to do with Myrtle he did not know. He could not take her with him, for he had never hinted to his friends of his adoption of the little girl; and, besides, he had so much to do and so many places to visit. He dreaded the effect of the separation upon her, for he was her only friend; and he knew that she would feel very desolate without him. He could have her boarded, of course; but he did not wish to trust her in any common hands, for he expected to be away a year. Finally, he concluded to ask the child's advice.

"Oh, papa, take me with you! take me with you!" was at first her passionate cry; but, when she found that that could not very well be, she said: "Why not put me in the seminary, papa, where all the little girls in Wakwaka are sent? I shall be so unhappy, I know; but my studies will be some comfort; and I should like to learn music, so as to play for you when you come back."

Hugh had an abhorrence of boarding-schools. He believed that many young ladies learned more lessons in dissimulation, extravagance, envy, affectation, and exaggerated sentiment, than they did in anything useful. He knew the principal of the Wakwaka school, however, and liked her well as a woman of character and high moral purposes. He trusted greatly, too, to Myrtle's intense love of nature, and to the influence of her early years, to defend her from the frivolities he so detested.

In a few weeks, his arrangements were all completed; and one spring morning he left his little Myrtle, weeping incomparably in the arms of Mrs. Dennison, her new protector.

"She must have all that is necessary to enable her to ap-

pear as well as the rest of your pupils: there will be no trouble about the time, Mrs. Dennison. And every accomplishment for which she seems to have a liking she must have the means of acquiring. If she has any peculiar taste or talents, let them develop under your judicious care, and I shall be fully satisfied with what you do for her. Love her, if you can; and I know you will, for she is a tender flower, and will wither if left too solitary."

Mr. Fielding's voice trembled a little as he uttered the last sentence; and he kissed poor Myrtle hastily, for fear the lady would see the tear upon his cheek. The next instant he was gone; and Myrtle was left to begin her new course of life.

It was many days before there was much color in her cheek, or light in her eye; and her kind guardian did not put her immediately into the school routine.

Like one of nature's fairst flowers, her spirit expanded in the sunlight of attention; and, as she was sweet, unoffending, innocent, and the practical heirress of the rich Mr. Fielding, every attention was showered upon her, until the smiles were as bright to her dark, luminous eyes, and the roses to her cheeks.

The world will amaze at my expected knowledge, perhaps; but my dear pupil astonished Mrs. Dennison, while her ignorance of some of the "first French," was equally surprising and amusing. Geography and grammar were unknown to her, but she could talk in Latin and French, quote parrot-fashion from old poetry with boundless emphasis, and tell more than anyone could say, and say it, than the most talkative member of the school. Besides this she had many quaint and odd accomplishments which made her appear surprisingly foolish, but which were simply the result of her having been brought up in a school and library, and educated by a man of polished manners and great culture. Her teacher went to work to improve her deportment, and instruct her in things practical in the society about her.

A few days passed with Myrtle. The confinement of the schoolroom did not like her; and she welcomed the long vacation with anxiety and regret for the liberty it gave her, but mostly because her father was to come back to her. He came, bringing her

many beautiful presents, which, at first, she was too happy to regard. They went out and spent two or three weeks at the cabin, in the old way, cooking their own meals, and rambling about the country most of the time.

Myrtle's joy was sadly discomfited by learning that Mr. Fielding had escaped from the East only long enough to make her a visit, and that he was going back for a long, long time, as soon as her school opened. It made every moment she spent with him still dearer. It sounded like a bell tolling at a funeral when she was summoned back to her studies.

Events shaped themselves so unexpectedly with Mr. Fielding, a journey to France being among them, and a long stay in that country to settle an estate coming to him from his mother, that he did not return to Wakwaka, after the first visit, for four years.

In those four years Myrtle Fielding had grown into maidenhood—she was little Myrtle no longer. The most lovely and beloved of the pupils at the seminary, distinguished for grace of manner and purity of soul, the pride of her guardian upon all occasions of public display, and the beauty of the school, she still pined, in loneliness of heart, for some one *to belong to*, some one who would call her daughter, and receive the lavish affection of her heart, which now continually wasted itself in the suns of vain regret. Such passionate, tear-bedewed letters as she addressed to her adopted father would certainly have called him to her side, had it been in his power to leave the interests which bound him where he was.

It was a very dangerous state for a young lady's heart to be in, thus craving after love and confidence. Such stores of affection, lying ready to be given away, would be very apt to find somebody to ask for them; and, if their proper owner did not appear in due time, some interloper might receive what had been accumulating for his benefit. Of this danger, Myrtle knew nothing; and Mrs. Dennis, wise and experienced as she was, had never given it a thought. Mrs. Dennis's young ladies were supposed to be beyond the reach of human weakness.

Ah, Hugh Fielding! Hugh Fielding! where art thou while this fair child of thy affections is blushing and blooming into her sixteenth summer? Hast thou no presents?

One Saturday in May, Myrtle had permission to go out to "her home," as she still called Mr. Fielding's place. A man and his wife had been put in the cabin to keep things in order; and whenever the young mistress chose to go out and spend her holiday rambling through her old haunts, she was sure of a good dinner and a warm welcome from them.

It was a delightful day, and, as she passed along, her guitar in her hand, her heart exulted in youthful fullness of life. A young lily with a guitar is always romantic, as millions of thirty-five who bend gracefully over the blue-tinted instruments in their boudoirs are certain to know—and a young lily was none the less romantic for being totally unconscious of it. She, happy and beautiful, thought nothing of effort, but strolled along, enjoying the freedom from school, and thinking of that long looked-for, long hoped-for father whom she was now expecting home in a very few weeks. Then she was to leave school, and they were to live together, and be happy, as of old.

Thinking of all this, Myrtle could hardly wait until she got beyond the clattering sildines which stretched for a mile along Little street, before her gayety burst forth in singing; and she went on singing the beautiful road, rivaling the birds who warbled in every tree.

Arriving at her destination, she just stepped in the house to give the woman "the news," and invite herself to dinner, and then flung out into the sunshine again, to spend the day, like the butterflies and flowers, in aimless pleasure.

All unwillingness to please a more critical audience, she dispelled by sitting in a little bower which commanded her favorite view of the lake, and began tuning her guitar for the birds to hear. For a while her fingers tinkled over the strings in aimless chords of melody; and then she began to sing. Fresh and pure as her own young soul, silvery as the waters at her feet, luminous as the air she breathed, with no voice but her own, she sang now as she never could have done in public or at "auditions." All the sweetest music within her went to her without effort; it appeared to her as if the willows at her feet turned a little to listen, and the birds wagged their heads in trilling their approval.

The sun shone her bent over her lovingly; her cheeks

flushed with the joy of her own singing; she made such a picture as young poets dream about but seldom realize.

Is it any wonder, then, that a certain youth, poet and artist both, who happened in that vicinity at this auspicious hour, should have felt as if he had intruded into Paradise, and held him breathless in tremulous pleasure and surprise?

It would seem that he had come forth double-armed against unsuspecting Nature, for a pencil and slip of fool-cap stuck out of his coat-pocket, and a portfolio of drawing materials was in his hand; but all thoughts of using either were banished, and he leaned against the trunk of an oak, not very far away from the singer, scarcely knowing whether he really saw and heard, or whether his fancy had bewitched him into some ancient land of gold-sand, or some unsubstantial Eden out of which he could nevermore find his way.

"Ah! he had indeed wandered into an Eden out of which he should never, never more go forth with free footsteps. But he did not know it yet."

So the young girl sang and sung for his pleasure, as well as that of the birds, until she fairly wearied herself out. Her guitar slided down into the grass, and she flung back her hair, with an exclamation:

"Oh, dear! I'm hungry! I wonder if it is dinner-time?"

It was a very weird speech to make at that enticing period when the youth was just looking to see her fly away in a golden cloud—it convinced him that she was of the earth, earthly, and gave him intense satisfaction.

At that moment she detected him, and knew by his blank that he had been listening.

"The impudent fellow," she murmured—as if he were to blame.

Affecting not to see him, she gathered up her bonnet and guitar and retreated to the house.

"Well," said Mrs. Jones, as she made her appearance, "your walk and the dumplings are done at the same time. Dinner is just ready: I'll ring the bell for the men, and we'll set down."

The man! Myrtie had never known of but one man about the prairies; and, as there was no farming to be done, she could not conceive of the use for another. Sure enough, the

tell us a bit for fun. She asked no questions, but waited for the son-in-law to dinner to gratify her curiosity in due time. Mr. Jones came in presently, and shook hands with her, smiling to his own heart, "hoping to find her flourishin'."

"Who's this John?" asked the wife, as they drew their chairs to the table.

"John!" said the husband, as he lifted the cover from a platter of fried trout.

"John!" he was, for at that minute he entered the door, doffing his campaign-hat with a graceful motion, and setting his camp-stool down in a corner.

"My nephew, John Jones, Miss Fidlin!"

Myrtle made her reply most quietly low. Nevertheless, she could detect the slight glint of a mischievous twinkle about the eyes of her new acquaintance, which the polite gravity of the rest of his countenance belied.

He sat down to dinner.

"You've been a strolling rascal, too, hasn't you, John?" said Mrs. Jones, as she handed him his coffee. "Did you and Miss Fidlin' see each other when you was out? I reckoned you'd meet."

"I saw Miss Fidlin'," returned the young man, "but I can not say whether she saw me or not."

Myrtle made no reply, being occupied with her fish.

"You've both of you such a love for rambling about and takin' up nesses, you ought to be acquainted. Two artits, as you call your lasses, at my table, I spose I ought to feel proud."

There was just the slightest heady motion to Myrtle's head, as did Mrs. Jones's eye, of an acquaintance-hip with the young man, which proved a little immature aristocracy; but the boy did not notice it, and could not be forbidding. In a moment, so she mused at the speaker, and kept her eyes steadily down the table. Mrs. Jones had not the least idea of the boy's name, until, "smart," fair as young men were, "for a quinin's" friend-hip; and neither was Myrtle quite sure but that he was.

"I'm a good kinf" said her husband, testily. "If John will give his damm'n ways of trying to make an end of Me and them, there will be somethin' to be prend of."

I've even-a'most give up all hope. If he'd quit pencils and such little patterin' trash, and take to lawyerin' or farmin', he'd suit me better. Not that I mean to be harsh," he added, in a softer tone; "and not but makin' pictures is pretty work for young gals."

Myrtle caught the young gentleman's eye, as old Mr. Jones concluded his speech, and laughed outright in her sweet, merry way.

"Do not make any apologies for being severe upon us," she said. "We know it's the fashion of the world to think there is common sense, as they call it, in nothing but in makin' money; so we do not expect sympathy."

"True?" responded the nephew, emphatically; and he and the beautiful girl opposite him began to feel more friendly.

"Waal, how are we to get along without money, I'd like to know?" asked Mr. Jones, senior, but in that gentle tone which he always used in speaking to Myrtle.

"Oh, don't ask me!" cried she; "I know nothing about it—I have never thought. I suppose papa furnishes me with what I want; and so I have not been obliged to ask."

"About as much as women usually know!" growled her questioner, with a laugh.

A general good-humor prevailed at the close of the meal, after which Mr. Jones took his nephew off to look at the cattle, which gave the aunt an opportunity of telling all about him—what a "likely" boy he was, and what great ideas he had got in his head, but how modest and good-humored he was, for all—that he was her favorite, and she'd asked him to come and stay with them as long as he liked—that he "writ verses," and "took profiles,"—and wouldn't Myrtle let him take hers for them,—they'd set great store by it, etc.; to all which Myrtle listened with keen interest, while her eyes kept wandering to the window looking for the return of the object of their talk. And when his bright face and black curls flashed past, her heart gave a little bound, she knew not wherefore.

To please the kind old woman she allowed him to sketch her in crayon, and then she had to sing some of her latest melodies for old Mr. Jones, and then—Mr. Jones, Jr., asked

her to walk out, and show him some of the pretty bits of scenery in the neighborhood.

And, if John Jones could hardly appreciate the beauty of the spot, as pointed out to him by the excited young creature before him, for thinking of the clustering glory of her hair, the freshness & loveliness of her features, and the expression of innocence in her eyes—lighted with brilliancy of soul which rendered them doubly attractive, it must likewise be confessed that Myrtle credit herself at many a stolen glance at the face of the hitherto despised, interesting boy.

The next Sunday, Myrtle went again to "her home," and every Sunday henceforth for weeks. This was always her custom in favorable weather; and Mrs. Dennison must not be blamed. Could she have dreamed that the people at the cabin had a nephew? or that her fastidious scholar could have been pleased with an unknown John Jones? or that the said John was an artist, and a very handsome, polite, and fascinating boy?

A golden mist hung over Myrtle's studies, obscuring their meeting in a haze of splendor. Perhaps the reason of her great and startling happiness, her unwonted moods of reverie, her constantly thrilling anticipations, was that she was soon to see her father. This did indeed take up a large portion of her thoughts; and she looked forward to the meeting with the intensity of a four years' old anticipation.

One Sunday she was no longer left to doubt the full meaning of her emotions. In the lower beneath the chin, in an upward moment of impassioned feeling, her boy-lover had smit on her face; and she had smiled upon his avowal.

She did not ask if he had position—if he had wealth—if he did not well enough—if her lover was worthy of her—if she was doing her duty; for when did a young girl, for the first time, feel impuse to answer such questions?

Myrtle knew has fully in the truth and worthiness of her boy-lover all in her own existence. She *had* her father to all appearance; and, in the mean time, she waited for him in ardent expectation.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. FIELDING RETURNS HOME.

AGAIN Mr. Fielding stood upon the eminence from which he first looked down upon Wakwaka. Below him lay a city of twenty thousand inhabitants; and on either side were gardens gorgeous with cultivated flowers, tree-shadowed avenues, fine mansions, and a costly, fashionable church. Beyond was the prairie upon which he had picked up the stray waif which had since become the "light of his eyes," the delight of his existence—something to love, to plan for, to make happy. That prairie waved with wild-grass and unnamed blossoms no longer: it was checkered with fields of green corn and wheat just gilded with the June sun; and a railroad passed in a straight, shining line across its bosom. While he lingered and looked, the iron horse came shrieking and panting along it, in place of the majestic wild steeds which once swept in their might through the long and rustling grass.

Thoughts of the past and present stirred strangely tender emotions in Hugh's breast. He remembered the little creature he had held so closely to him as he rode over the hills; he remembered the tragic fate of her mother, that beautiful woman who, alone of all the women in the world, had bowed down his heart, and whose weakness or whose falsehood had poisoned all of his existence for the last twenty years.

Thinking of all this, he hurried on, eager to greet his long-forsaken little Myrtle—for little she still seemed to him. He knew her better in memory than in present reality. He had left the coach on the hill, that he might have a better opportunity of observing the changes in the town. As he passed along the hand-some street, he saw Mrs. Dennis's dwelling on a larger building than she occupied when he left, for her school had grown with the city. He ran, and was shown

into a room, where he sent his name to Mrs. Dennison and his daughter.

He sat waiting in impotent joy, eager to see his child again, when the door opened and she glided in. He arose to his feet instinctively, but the words he was to have spoken were unsaid.

It was all in vain that Myrtle had kept telling him in her letters how much she had grown, and that she was quite a young lady, and all that. To be sure, he had entertained a notion of her having put up some of her curls and lengthened them a little, and that perhaps she would be a little awkward in her transition state from pretty embroidered pantaloons to daintier flannel dresses. But *“Myrtle!”*—the word “daughter” died in his heart, and another word leaped up. It was as if the vision of his early manhood—that glorious vision which had haunted him with such a brightness, only to vanish suddenly in a dark and profane than before—again lived and breathed before him. Here was the same slender and round figure, decked with health and an unconscious grace, the same brown hair falling in shadowy masses touched with gold, the same fair face, the same eyes beaming their luminous sweetness upon him.

“Myrtle!” he murmured.

She looked a moment, as if wondering why he did not open his arms to receive her, and then flew to him, and flung her arms about his neck.

“Pardon, dear father!” she sobbed, with a little burst of sobs; and then shaking off his checks a dozen times, and laid her head on his shoulder, laughing and wiping away the sudden drops from her eyes.

“I’m not fit to speak to him,” said Hush to himself, as those soft words went through him. “Thank Heaven, though, I am *not* your father!”

“Are you not glad to see your baby girl?” asked Myrtle, smiling, and at the silence with which he received her words. “Oh, papa, you have forgotten your Myrtle!”

He gazed at her, her to his breast, and kissed her with the passionate love which was struggling in his heart; but he felt that it would not be permanent thus, and so he gave her none. He knew that her English training would shrink from so sad-

den an expression of feeling, could she be conscious of its nature, and its perceptions of truth were too delicate to permit him to deceive her. But oh, what a sweet hope had flowered into beauty in his soul! Hugh Fielding forgot that he was forty-eight years of age. He was as strong, as handsome, as full of life as ever, and he forgot that he was growing old. He did not ask himself if he was the ideal of a young girl's lover. The surprise was too sudden, too overpowering—he did not as yet even question his own emotions.

"No, Myrtle," he said, "I have not forgotten you—scarcely for an instant. I have been as eager as you for this meeting. But I was so surprised to find you so tall, so beautiful, so much of a young lady."

Myrtle blushed and laughed.

"Didn't I tell you, papa, that you would be astonished?"

At this moment Mrs. Demison came in, having paused to arrange her ringlets and put on a new, coquettish little straw lace cap, with lilies-of-the-valley drooping from its softness, and mingling with her still raven curls.

The beautiful and satisfactory appearance of her pupil had half the desired effect upon Mr. Fielding, for he greeted her with marked pleasure. His joy, his gratitude, tinged his manner with rosy warmth; and she being equally gratified, they were a happy trio.

"Would you think, Mrs. Demison, papa was amazed to find me grown so tall?" cried the young girl. "He imagined I had stood still for the last four years."

"I suppose he hardly realized that he would have a young lady on his hands, really to be introduced into the world. Do not you think it a great responsibility, Mr. Fielding?" with a sweet smile.

"Why, yes! certainly; it presents itself to me in a new light," was the rather hesitating reply.

"Oh, papa, I assure you I shall not be the least trouble," laughed Myrtle. "I have never teased Mrs. Demison so much, and I shall tease you still less."

"Your daughter says truly that she was never much trouble to me. She seems more like a child than a pupil. It will be a severe struggle for me to give her up to you. I feel like a mother to her."

"You have been very, very kind," murmured Myrtle, leaving her clasp of her father's hand to glide over and give her friend a kiss. "But we shall live so near that I can come to you every week, and you can spend the vacations with us. Will not that be pleasant, papa?"

"Delightful!" he replied; for whatever pleased Myrtle, pleased him.

Myrtle had to resign her new-found treasure while he went to his hotel to rid himself of the dust of travel. But he returned, by invitation, to tea, and she had a happy evening. Once Mrs. Dennison sent her from the room for a while upon some excuse; for, as she told Mr. Fielding, she had an important matter to speak of, which her interest in the dear child prompted should be said.

"You know," she said, in this confidential communication, "that Myrtle is no longer a child. She has graduated with the first honors of my school, and I must now take her place in society, Mr. Fielding. She requires a female friend and companion; some relative of yours, perhaps, you can invite to reside with you for that purpose. I wish that Myrtle had a mother; but, as that cannot be, I think it well for you to think of what I have suggested; and more especially, as you are only her adopted father; to assure you think of her as fondly and tenderly—"

"I do," interrupted her listener.

"As if she were your own child; yet the world—since we live in the world, Mr. Fielding, we must regard its dictates."

Hugh was really much obliged to the lady for what she had said and hinted. He confessed that, since he had seen Myrtle, and thought of this difficulty, it all dawned dimly upon his mind, but he had not yet had time to reflect upon it. If Mrs. Dennison would consent, he should leave her pupil with her a few weeks, until some arrangements could be made.

This plan pleased her very much. She would have an opportunity of impressing upon him deeply the necessity of a tutor for Myrtle.

In the mean time, as the object of this discussion came glibly in her usual buoyancy back into the room, Hugh smiled at his friend, thoughts of how little Mrs. Dennison knew of his real purposes, of how little she suspected the ease with

which he could take upon himself the office of protector. Thus do people oftentimes work at cross-purposes.

Myrtle sang and played, bewitching the heart of her Bachelor guardian more and more; and when at last she kissed him good-night, and he went to his dreams, they were more the roseate hue of twenty-two than forty-eight.

The next day, he began to display that energy which had not particularly marked his character since the inspiring of hope had been withdrawn. He took Mrs. Dennison and Myrtle out to his place to select a situation for the mansion which he had already partially contracted for. Of course, the elder lady was glad to have a voice in the matter which might hereafter be of importance to her; and she took it as a very favorable symptom that she was asked to make one of the party. Hugh was only acting upon her suggestions that he must have a *chaperon* for the young girl.

They alighted before the cabin door, where John Jones, the artist, came out and assisted the ladies to alight. Did Hugh mark the blush upon the cheeks of the young couple? Of course he did not. Never was there a man blinder to truth and fate than he.

After Mr. Fielding had exchanged greetings with the tenants of his house, and been introduced to their nephew, he invited the latter to accompany them, and they started out on their search.

The fine, artistic taste of the boy at once attracted Hugh's attention, and he learned that the young man was an artist by profession. It was John himself who, with becoming modesty, pointed out the spot which he would deem most desirable; and its admirable fitness striking all the rest of the party, helped to confirm the good opinion Mr. Fielding had involuntarily formed of him.

"There is certainly a good deal of genius about that young fellow," he remarked to Myrtle, when John was busy talking about pictures with Mrs. Dennison. "He has a glorious eye—full of fire and frankness."

How the young girl's heart leaped up!—while she made not the least reply. Alas, Hugh flattered himself that that glowing cheek and drooping eye was an evidence of some gentle emotion for him!

Learning that the young artist had made architecture his study, Mr. Fielding gave him a commission to draw the plan for the new residence, giving him a summary of what he should require to size, style, and expense. He was usually a man of plodding vision, and but few things escaped his keen apprehension; yet, all-absorbed as he was in his own dreams, he did not notice the expressive glance and stolen pressure of hands with which Myrtle and the young man parted. Mrs. Dennis, too, bewitched by gorgeous visions of a mansion over which she was to preside, the site for which she had just selected, was deaf, and dumb, and blind to every thing but Mr. Fielding.

So the party drove back to town as contented with each other as when they started out.

Myrtle was impatient to get away from the seminary, as schoolgirls usually are. She did not know how to wait for the trial date. If it would not have involved the necessity of driving John Jones away, she would have wished the cabin more readily visited, that they might return to their old, romantic way of living. Mrs. Dennis was so continually with them that it seemed as if she should never get an opportunity of revealing to her father the weight that was on her heart—necessities she did not far so much to make, since she saw him weep for her lover. When she actually found herself walking out to the lawn alone with Mr. Fielding, her heart began to palpitate faintly with anticipation. She found that what she wished to say was very hard to put into words, after all. So they passed onward, Hugh doing most of the talking, until they reached the lower. The sight of the spot where her lover had sunk upon his knee at her feet impelled her to the trial.

"Dear father," she began, in a faltering voice, "I have wished so much for an opportunity—"

A long pause, while she stood picking a rose to pieces, the color suffusing cheeks and brow.

"Dear father—"

"What can my father gain?" cried Hugh, in a sudden burst of passionate energy.

She looked up timidly. His cheek was likewise flushed; and his bright eyes were bent upon her with an expression which she could not understand.

"I can not endure it," he said, grasping her hand tightly. "Every time you have uttered that word since my return, it has almost distracted me. Can not you guess why, Myrtle?"

Her eyes fell under the glow of tender light which burned in his. She trembled with a sudden apprehension.

"It is because I love you with other than paternal love, darling Myrtle. Since the first moment of my return, I have felt how impossible it was for me to resist the torrent of passion which rushes through my heart. You are to me ~~now~~ Myrtle—the Myrtle of old, when I once loved with the fervor of youth. It is true that your mother—for I feel that she was your mother—was false; but, in ~~your~~ heart, Myrtle, there is nothing but truth. You have not learned the ways of the world. You are my boyhood's dream. Will you marry me?"

Poor child! how she trembled! He thought it was all with maiden timidity, and put his arm around her and drew her to his side. She leaned her head upon his shoulder, sobbing: "You are my father, Mr. Fielding. Oh, still remain, or you will break my heart!"

"Father?" again he exclaimed, in a voice of such concentrated feeling that she involuntarily looked up into his pale face.

"I tell you I ~~can~~ not hear it. Wife is a much dearer term than daughter, Myrtle"—how tenderly he spoke the word wife!—"and, if you can not be that, I must go away again—back to the lonely life I led before I found you, a little sleeping, helpless child, upon the prairie."

With a great, high-hearted struggle of duty and gratitude over youthful love, Myrtle flung her arms, in the old childish way, about his neck.

"You shall not do that, sa—Hugh; I will be whatever you wish. I will be your wife, Mr. Fielding."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLOT.

Mr. Fivemore was reclining upon a knoll beneath a tree, hidden by the long grass which rustled around him. A volume of "Shakspeare," open at the "Midsummer Night's Dream," had nearly dropped from his hand; and he had lost it in all but the fancies and the loves of the boy in rapture upon his own happiness. The clink of workmen's hammers, as they carved and polished the stone for his new house, sounded upon his ears pleasantly; for, as the hum of the town, of smaller and sunnier sweets, the soft tumult of the distant work told of a home and a wife.

The first thing which roused him from his reverie was the sound of approaching voices, conversing in low but earnest tones. Looking up, he saw his Myrtle and the young artist closely walking arm in arm, to and fro, on the level stretch of land before him. At first, he could distinguish no words, and, indeed, he did not wish to do, though his curiosity was excited by the absorbing interest with which they approached him. At last, they passed quite near him, and, hearing their voices at each other, he could see the two little children.

"A pretty wench! ye leaves and earth!" mused Mr. Fivemore, when his eyes met Myrtle's. His voice, however, was lost in the question. "Is there no truth in woman?"

After gazing on them for some time, Myrtle turned away, and clasped her hands tightly together. He could see her beautiful face bathed in tears.

"I have suffered, in the violence of remorse which has possessed me again. "I have never seen you since. You have filled my heart, in your thoughts, I know. You will not believe me. I have given way to every impulse of

gratitude and duty did I consult over happiness before that of my friend, my benefactor, my more than father. You know all that he has done for me—all the claims he has upon me. I should rather we should both be miserable all our lives than to be the one to inflict pain upon him. You do not ask it, do you, John?"

"No, no, I do not. His claims are superior to mine. But oh, Myrtle, it is killing me!"

"Don't say that, John. You will be happy some time, if only to reward you for your noble sacrifice now: I know you will. Heaven will bless you. Good-by."

Her companion gazed at her as if he could not tear himself away.

"Go, go, dear John. Good-by."

"O God! Myrtle. Good-by."

He turned from her with a listless, weary step, and went away, leaving her leaning against a young maple-tree, looking after him with blinded eyes.

Hugh had heard and seen it all. Slowly his anger had melted away, as he heard this youthful pair bravely renouncing what was their evident happiness for him. For the first time, his own selfishness appealed to him. What right had he to require the love and duty of that young heart which had turned so much more naturally to a more fitting mate? Yet he had to acknowledge his pride and conscious of his rare requirements as he was, that John Jones, with his boyish beauty and enthusiasm and fresh feeling, was a more suitable companion than he for the fair girl who had chosen him. Yet he had not meant to be selfish. He loved Myrtle too well for that. Ah, it was always his fate to play the martyr—to see the intended cup snatched away, to know no fruition of his hopes. He was too much of a hero to shrink from the cross. He could not blight the happiness of two years and four full years of Miss for himself. He would exultate the greatness which he had just seen. He went to it and called the boy to return and receive from his hands the most precious gift which he had told him. But when he attempted to call, he found his throat so parched that no sound would come from it. The disappointment was too terrible—it had come upon him too suddenly.

The clink of workmen's hammers still smote upon his ears, but now the sound was full of pain; he felt as if he must put a stop to it; he wished a paralysis to seize upon that noble building, stalling it, as it stood—fixing it forever, unfinished and desolate—that it might never fulfil its destiny as a home of warmth, and luxury, and comfort, the shelter of loving hearts, the birthplace of happy children. Unfinished, and going to decay, the unfinished promise of a home, showing its wealth of rooms and splendor of proportions, only to make its ruin the more complete—would it not be like his life, thus unsatisfactory, thus checked of its development? A bitterness deeper than that of his first disappointment welled up in his soul. From under the shadow of the hand upon which his forehead was clasped, he watched in silence, until the young girl had wiped her eyes quiet and walked away in the direction of the town. Then he arose and sauntered listlessly toward the new mansion. Young Jones was overseeing the work as usual. Perceiving Mr. Felling, he approached him.

"I have within and very important reasons for resigning the charge of your work," he began, in a low but firm voice. "How, now?" interposed Hugh, angrily.

"I do not think I shall put you to any inconvenience by doing so," continued the young man; "the plans are so lately drawn, and the work so far progressed, that it can be easily left to another. Besides, I have consulted an architect of Wexford, who promises to take my place—"

"This your plan—no one can take your place, John Jones!" Hugh might be intended as a compliment; if it was, it was uttered with a strangely savage tone.

"I do not; I shall not release you, sir; you must fall into my hands with me, or take the whole."

Mr. Felling was usually so courteous and considerate in all his ways, that John looked up amazed; there was a dark intensity in his eye which he had never before observed. "And you say truly, "can it be possible he is so unfeeling?" he asked; "if this is the case, poor Myrtle, I pity you."

"Yes, and you must complete this work according to our contract. If a written article of the contract will I absolve you."

Poor Hugh! his companion little guessed what a tempest warred within him; and that he was only putting on a little outside fierceness to cover a purpose the most unashamed and pure. The only consolation he had in his solitude of heart, was the playing of a pretty farce, by which he kept two young people miserable for the time being, with the expectation of surprising them with a double and overwhelming happiness by-and-by. Not one hint did he give of the knowledge he possessed, but exactly of the young architect the fulfilment of his contract, thus keeping him in the vicinity so fraught, to him, with dangerous dreams and mocking desires. Almost every day, as the summer sped by, he would pierce the heroic breast of the youth with some such shaft as the following:

"Hurry up the workmen, John, my boy. Don't you know the wedding is set for the 10th of September? We must have wedding and house-warming at the same time."

Or this:—

"You are doing so nicely, John, you shall come to the wedding to pay for this. You shall dance with the bride!"

As often as twice a week his handsome open barouche would drive up into the new grounds; the spirited bay horses would be checked with a gay flourish, and the owner of the establishment would hand out its future mistress to spend a half-hour in inspecting the progress made on the mansion, and giving his opinion as to this improvement and that, and would it suffice to have things thus and so, as if he feasted upon their secret misery. Mr. Fiddler seemed to make opportunities for throwing the young pair into each other's society. Their tastes were mutually consulted, and they were left to decide matters of minor importance to themselves. It was end of the arch plotter—he knew it was, yet he jested him-self with glowing pictures of a future surprise in which all this wretchedness should be blotted out in golden splendor, and he only be the suffering party—a sufferer whom no one should know was wretched. It would have been hard enough for the young couple to forget each other if they had separated at once and forever, as they had resolved to do. He made the king-of-the-hill, one which seemed not more than a week old, yet he took a strange pride in preserving the noble principle of both—how well they guarded their honor, and

and as how calm their voices, how innocent their greetings, and farewells.

Myrtle was a tingling according to the promptings of gratitude and duty; and she did not intend to humiliate her sacrifice by any thought or do I which should wrong the man she had induced to marry. She meekly obeyed his suggestions as to the preparations for the approaching marriage.

"Have you plenty of money to buy pretty things, Myrtle?"

"I suppose, Mr. Felling. My purse is always supplied. No matter how much I waste, the next time I open it, it is full."

"A comfortable purse, indeed. But really, my dear, you are not extravagant. Have you ordered the wedding-dress?"

"Mrs. Dennison has, I believe. I trusted it to her."

"I hope it will be a pretty one. Don't fail to have it pretty, Myrtle. Do you know I am particular about ladies' dress? I like to see y^e useful and pretty creatures looking like roses and lilies."

"Mrs. Dennison will see that it is all it should be—she has the same taste, I believe."

"And are you indifferent? Young girls usually go half-crazy over the delight and excitement of the bridal *procession*."

"Why, no, Mr. Felling, I hope I am not indifferent. I should like to look to please you."

How warmly the young hand clung against his shoulder! How sweetly into her face! She was so beautiful—he loved her so much—that he was but tempted to renounce his wedded wife, to accept the expected sacrifice. He could not bear her up—she was tall. She was his; she looked as though she were his wife; was it not more than man could do, to give her into the arms of another? The arm he had laid around her waist clutched so tightly that she shuddered with the effort. It was the first time he had bestowed one caress upon her. He gave it a quick kiss upon the cheek at meeting, and passed on. She did not know it, but there were farewells in that kiss. She would call such future joy, in that one passionate embrace.

"This is the last of September," said he, seating her by his side, and holding her daintily fast; "in five days, Myrtle! It is time the wedding-dress was ready."

"It is made, and it is beautiful enough to please you, be you as fastidious as you may: white silk, rich and shining, covered with costly, delicate lace; flowers on the bosom; a wreath for my hair, and a vail of the most exquisite design. Mrs. Dennison sent to New York for them. Mrs. Dennison takes great interest in these things; but she does not seem in as good spirits lately. She says I am to be envied."

She seemed to be talking to keep thought away, and to prevent him saying those tender things which girls generally love to hear. He looked at her closely while she chattered away; her cheek was surely growing thinner, though suffused with the bloom of excitement; there was a sadness, as of unshed tears, in the faltering eyes—yet she smiled, such tremulous, lovely smiles, and tried hard to seem gay and glad. He worshiped her all the more, as he saw the depths of her character thus proved by circumstance. Those gentle smiles touched him to renew more firmly his vow to secure her happiness, and let his own take care of itself.

"It is only five days more," he murmured. "Let me keep you till then; let me call you mine until then. Five days will not rob you of many dimples which the future will not restore to your cheeks."

"What did you say, Mr. Fielding?"

"I was 'talking in my sleep'—no matter what I said. Mrs. Dennison has been low-spirited, has she? Well, I have a present for her. Ask her to accept it from me as a trifling return for her kindness to you. She must wear them to the wedding."

He showed her a velvet-lined box, containing a superb set of jewels—brooch and ear-rings—a large diamond in each, set about with small emeralds.

"And here is my gift to you; you must wear it with the vail and wreath," and he placed in her hand a necklace of pearls.

"You are too good to me—far too good to me," murmured Myrtle, tremulously, hardly looking at the beautiful ornament. She felt as if she had wronged this generous man by ever having had a thought of another, no matter how conscientiously she now strove to forget that other.

"Come, Myrtle, you look regretful. Do you not like the

pearls? Never mind; we will change them, then. Play for me, now. I have not heard you sing for a fortnight."

He led her to the piano. *

"What shall I sing? Have you any choice?"

"Here is something that reads prettily; I do not think I have heard the music. Try it, and I will tell you if it pleases me."

So she began, in a trembling voice, which gradually steadied itself:

"*LIDA, lady of the land,*
Hath a crew of gallant suitors;
Squires who fly at her command;
Kings her slightest motion tutors:
She hath barons kneeling mute,
To hear the fortune of her proffers;
All—except the honest suit
JOHNNY GORDON humbly offers.

"*LIDA, lady of the land,*
Keep your wondrous charms untroubled,
May your wife'd in expand!
May your gains and gifts be doubled!
Keep your lords on bended knee!
Take all earth, and leave us lonely,
All—except you take from me
Humble JOHNNY GORDON only!"

Whether it were the name of Johnny alone, or whether it was rather the relief that she had lost her humble lover, or what it was that overcame poor Myrtle so, hardly had she finished the exciting note of the more fortunate maiden in the room than she burst into tears, and hastily fled from the room.

"Poor child! she is getting nervous," murmured Mrs. Dickinson, who had come into the parlor during the singing; "I don't you think she is rather young to marry, Mr. Fiddling? especially a person so much—so much—"

"Mr. Fiddling to be her father, my dear lady. Well, perhaps—but it is rather late to be making such reflections. May I trouble you to take charge of this necklace, which she has forgotten? And here is a trifle which I trust you will be particularly willing to the wedding."

The lady accepted the gift with smiles, and Hatch bowed himself out into the darkness, and walked five miles by starlight, before he could compose himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

MYRTLE'S MOTHER.

THAT mysterious plot by which Hugh Fielding wished to immolate himself at the moment when he raised others to the pinnacle of happiness, was to allow the preparations for the wedding to go on, as if he were to be the bridegroom, and at the last moment, when the company was assembled, to refuse to take that important part upon himself, but allot it to John Jones, Jr., while he sank into the second place as groomsmen.

But "the best laid plans will oft go wrong," as this one threatened to now, very much to his chagrin. John Jones was not to be heard from. The day and hour that his part of the contract had been finished, he had vanished from the vicinity. He was not the person to stay and lament over his misfortunes, working himself up into frenzy by watching the happiness of another, which he coveted for himself.

He had disappeared, and to an artfully-put question, Myrtle returned such an answer, that Hugh found she was ignorant of his whereabouts. So were the uncle and the aunt. Here was a pretty kettle of fish for a man who had laboriously concocted quite a different dish. Hugh did not know, after all, but he shoul'l be under the necessity of marrying Myrtle himself, or delaying the wedding, which would be almost as bad, seeing everybody was invited, the cake baked, the dress completed, the minister engaged, and the new house put in order.

"Dear siz!" said Mrs. Jones, when he went to her cabin, to inquire about her nephew. "I hain't the least idee where the boy is. He's been gone a week now, and it woul'n't sprize me a bit if he was 'way back to York. He's seem' homesick and discontented, lately. He was always independent, John was—goin' and comin' and doin' as he pleased. Not that he ever plese'd me to do any thing bad, for he didn't; there never was a better nor a smarter boy, that I've had no more

opportunities, if I do say it, as am his aunt. He's never had a mother, poor boy, since he was five year old. And you come to invite him to the weddin'? it's mighty polite of you, sir; and I'm sorry he's gone off, for I know he'd have liked to go first-rate. He's always taken a shine to Miss Myrtle, and I'd like to be to her wedding, I know."

"I don't doubt that!" ejaculated her visitor; "and it's mighty important he should be there. In fact, Mrs. Jones, I'm afraid Miss Myrtle will feel as if she couldn't get married without he were present."

"You don't say so! well, it's very kind of her, to be sure; and I'm dreadfully sorry he's given us the slip so. I've been over to the new house, seein' to things. The carpets is all down now, and the rooms well aired; the kitching is furnished ready for Mr., and Black Dinah is there seein' to the vittals. She'll have two more out to help her the day of the weddin', I s'pose. The waiters, and I've seen to the rooms up-stairs. Every thing is lookin' beautiful; the new furniture is set in the chambers. If the fixin's for the parlors and the library come tomorrow, every thing will be ready in time. I wonder what made John clear out just now. He hain't eat nuthin' for a month, and is said to be powerful quiet, but they say this as write and in the pictures is subject to such turns, and I didn't mind it in particular."

"And you don't know where a note would reach him, if I should try to send him one?"

"No, I don't. He may be in York State, and he may be in Mississippi. To tell the truth, it do no harm to write to Clarkville, New York, but he couldna't get it in time to come to the weddin'. May be he'll be back as suddenly as he went off."

"Well, if he don't, I'm afraid he'll have cause to repent it," said the old man to him. He, adding aloud: "I shall be sorry to tell Mr. Jones, at all events; don't disappoint me."

"I'll pay you back in out of the kitching, where I'm helping Mrs. Jones when the ceremony's goin' on," responded Mrs. Jones, with a courtesy.

"No, no! I'm obliged to come down in your house, and be my guest, Mrs. Jones. This is an occasion when one wishes to see all their friends rejoicing with him—and who are more truly my friends than you and your husband?"

"Indeed, and I do not believe any one is, so far as that goes," replied she, looking at him with respect and admiration. "I'd have liked, right well, to have given Miss Myrtle suthin' handsome as a present; but poor folks like us has nothin' to give that would be acceptable, so I've baked the bride-cake, and a beauty it is! There's a ring in it, too—a real gold ring—which John give me to put in; and whoever gets it will be married next, they say."

"Good-day, Mrs. Jones, and if you hear from your nephew, let me know."

"I will, immejetly, Mr. Fieldin'."

It was too bad to ruin such a striking and romantic *commeilé*, as Hugh had censored himself with contriving. He was walking to and fro across the lawn in front of the new house, thinking of it. It wanted but two days to that set forth in the invitations; whether to recall those, with notes worded, "deferred till further notice," or whether to allow affairs to proceed and wind up, as everybody, save himself, expected, were the two horns of this dilemma.

"That provoking young rascal! he deserves to lose all he might have gained," he muttered, kicking a willow-seed in the face, who was listening with innocent curiosity to his colloquies.

"What are you treating that pretty flower so rudely for?" asked an arch voice at his elbow; he turned, growing red in the face, at being caught in such an ungentlemanly act.

"Why, Myrtle! what's brought you over here? I haven't been able to get you near this place for a fortnight. You seem to be growing shy of your future home."

"It seems so strange to think I am to live here so soon with you—your wife—that I am almost afraid of it. But Mrs. Demi-an had occasion to consult the land-keeper about the arrangements, and she insisted upon my coming along. She is in the house now, deep in consultation with Aunt Dinah; she sent me to pay my respects to you."

"I am very much obliged to Mrs. Demi-an. Will you take my arm for a stroll, little bird?"

How she started at the word! How pale she grew, and hardly with happiness, though she strove to force a smile! The little trembling hand sought his arm, and she walked by

his side, silent, pale, abstracted. He pitied her. He saw the effort she was making to appear to be happy. He wished the farce were over. When he had reinstated her in her birth-right of joy and love—when he had crowned his queen with the talisman of content—had beheld her supremely blessed, exquisitely grateful and joyous—he would be ready to retire to the melancholy shades of perpetual old bachelorhood. They came, in the course of their walk, to the same old oak-tree, under which a shallow Hugh had sat, when he saw and heard the passionate parting of the two lovers. It was evident to him that Myrtle recalled the scene, for she leaned upon his arm more heavily, and he guessed that she was weeping, from the way in which her handkerchief stole to her eyes at intervals.

"Let us sit here and rest," said Hugh, not appearing to notice her tears. "I'm so provoked, little one, to think that John Jones has gone off, without staying to the wedding." At the mention of that name he felt a quiver of the hand he held.

"Why should you—I thought—I didn't know—"

"Then I care any thing about that young scamp grace. But I do! I like and respect him much, and would have been glad to have him present at the ceremony. I've half a mind to go to see him until he is heard from. Say, pass, do you think you could endure the disappointment?"

Hugh looked into her face with such a querulous, half-sighed, half-sighed look, as to puzzle her most completely.

"Why, Hugh, what do you mean? do you really wish Mr. Jones to be present, so much as that?—for my part, I am glad he is gone."

"Then you don't wish the ceremony deferred?"

He continued to read his countenance; the proposition was not a case for an ardent lover to make to his betrothed, or even to treat more seriously than the absence of a possible suitor. It was a person whom he had never especially liked—whom he was suspicious and disliked.

"Indeed, indeed, I shall defer to your superior judgment," she answered, presently.

"You are a good girl, Myrtle,—a dutiful child. You are to marry him, out of deference to my judgment; and I am obliged to marry me, for the same all-powerful reason. I only ask you to see what reply you would make,

Well, my little girl, I want to tell you that I chanced to witness an interview which took place between you and that silly boy—”

“He isn’t a boy,” interrupted Myrtle, proudly.

“Between you and that silly young gentleman, from which I had reason to infer that he was deeply interested in you, and I wished him to be at your wedding.”

“Oh! Mr. Fielding, I did not think you could be so cruel!” exclaimed Myrtle, looking up at him reproachfully.

“Why shouldn’t I be cruel?” he asked, setting his features into a sternness which frightened her. “I have been cruelly treated—twice I have been cruelly disappointed—is it not enough to make a man revengeful?”

“But I have tried to do right, oh! Mr. Fielding, I have tried!”

That innocent face turned to his with such a look of pain, the tears streaming down the pale cheeks, made him wish to clasp her in his arms and exclaim—

“Yes, my brave girl, and for all this girlish heroism thou shalt have thy reward!”

While he was still debating whether it was possible for him thus suddenly to immolate himself, another person was added to the scene.

A lady came along the path from the cabin, looking about as if in search of some one. When she caught sight of Myrtle, she paused a moment and looked at her earnestly—but not more earnestly than Hugh was now regarding her. She was a fine-looking woman, of perhaps forty—she looked thirty-five—and beautiful as in her earliest youth. Her bonnet was swinging from her arm, for the day was warm. Her hair was put up in a classic braid behind, and clustered in rich ringlets down either side of her face; her cheeks were as fair as a girl’s, and flushed with exercise; her form was full but graceful, and her step light.

“Is the dead alive?” gasped Hugh.

She heard and saw him not: her eyes were upon the face of the young girl. She threw her bonnet and scarf upon the ground, and ran and clasped her in her arms.

“My child—my own little Minnie! say, are you not?” she cried, leading the surprised girl away from her, so as to gaze again upon her countenance.

"I am Myrtle—Myrtle Fielding. What do you mean?" asked the young girl, confused by this unexpected apparition.

"Fielding?" said the lady, in a voice which thrilled to Hugh's instant heart. "Hugh Fielding!—was it he who found you?"

"It was."

"And were you lost, fifteen years ago this day, upon a prairie? Speak, speak quickly: are you my child?"

"Are you my mother?" was the response; and the two deep hands and clung together as if they had longed for each other since the moment they were so terribly separated.

"Myrtle, do I see you again?" said a deep voice beside them.

Beth started, but it was not over Myrtle who was addressed this time. The lady gave one glance of those still glorious eyes into Hugh's, and sank fainting in his arms.

"Hugh," he heard her whisper, as her senses deserted her.

Myrtle ran for water to the lake, while Hugh supported the fainting lady upon his bosom with a strange emotion. She was sure she saw like kissing these pale cheeks as she took a look with her straw hat dripping from the wave.

"It was too much," said Mrs. Sherwood, as she came back to him. "It is weak and foolish for well people to faint. But to find my child, and to find you, Hugh!"

"What fault was it that you ever lost me?" he asked, with his mien, as the dreariness of twenty years returned upon his heart.

"No man can," was the reply. "That I was not firm enough in resisting the mandates of a father, who had a selfish purpose in giving me to that man, that man," she added, with a slight shudder, "who perished so fearfully, and who was the father of my child; for that I shall remember him with respect, if not affection."

When Mrs. Sherwood was recovered sufficiently to sit upon the ground beneath the tree, and tell the story of the past, while holding this to her daughter's hand, she gave a brief account, which she afterward made more circumstantial, of what happened after they were surprised by the Indians and their leader Myrtle. Herself and her companion in suf-

siring, the wife of the other murdered man, were driven off in the wagon; and in an attempt to escape with her child from the back of the vehicle, she had been detected, and jerked back so rudely as to cause her to drop the infant. They would not pause to pick it up, but hurried on, unmindful of her agony.

She herself chanced to have a knife in her pocket, which she resolved should liberate her by death, if no other chance of succor offered; and possibly it might be of service in securing her both life and liberty.

The first day, they left the wagon and journeyed on foot through the wilderness. Her companion sank down, and died before night. She journeyed on, urged by the speed of her tormentors, until the second night, when they found her, hungry, weary, with bleeding feet and anguished heart, to the earth, and went off for water and food, intending to return and camp at that place. They had stopped before reaching water, because she could go no farther. As soon as they disappeared down a hill-side, leaving not one to watch her, she cut the thongs which bound her, and ran for her life. She did not know, when she arose, that she could place one foot before the other; but fear and hope gave her superhuman energy. In a few minutes she came to a stream. In this she waded to put them at fault. The cool water soothed her wounded feet and revived her somewhat. She ran for a long time down the stream, until, coming to a wild place where rocks and ravines provided places of concealment, she made her way up the bank, and, by fortune, stumbled into a cavern, over which she drew the vines which had before concealed it, and lay down in the darkness, for it was now twilight. Overcome by fatigue, she fell asleep, despite her fear of wild animals and her wild tormentors. When she awoke it was day.

All that day she did not dare to venture out. Some berries were growing among the moss at the mouth of the cave, and with a handful of them she cooled her thirst. Hearing nothing to alarm her, as soon as it again came light, keeping her hand open in her hand, she crept out, and went, as rapidly as her strength would permit, still further away from the place. She walked all the night and slept the rest. The next day

the small berries; the third, she emerged from the woods into a strange country. A single cabin told of civilization. She crawled to the door, and was received by an old woman, who hunted and fished for a living. There she was ill for a month, lying on a bed of buffalo-skins; but the people were as kind to her as they knew how to be. She had some money, but they would not take it. When she was able, the old man accompanied her a couple of days till they reached the edge of a settled country, and left her. She found out that she was a hundred miles from the spot where her husband was murdered. After various trifling adventures, by hunting and working, she reached her own home, where every one had long given her up for dead. Her child, she had no doubt, was dead. They told her about Mr. Fielding's letter, and she then knew that her little babe had perished of fright and hunger in the solitary prairie.

It was several years before she recovered entirely from the effects of her suffering and grief. She had never been a happy woman. By the most chance she had heard, only about four weeks before, of the circumstance of a child being found and adopted by a gentleman near Wakwaka. She had come, impelled by a faint hope, to that city, and there had heard more particulars.

When she told her brief and hurried narrative, Hugh took the trembling hand which lay in her lap, and pressed it between his own, as if to assure her that her troubles were over.

"Dear father," whispered Myrtle in his ear, "don't you think you will be pleased to let me pass as your little daughter, again?"

"Go, girl," he said, laughing, "and run and bring back that boy you sent off in such a hurry, some weeks ago."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HAPPY CONSUMMATION.

MYRTLE did not return with Mrs. Dennison that afternoon; but the rest of that day and evening were spent with her newly-found mother, in a private parlor of the hotel.

"Isn't it odd? I wish you could wear my wedding-dress, mother, but I guess it will hardly fit you."

"And if it would, it would scarcely be appropriate. It will not be long before you will need it yourself, I fear!"

It was Myrtle's turn now to blush.

"Seven o'clock. Hugh was to be here at seven;" and the lady looked at the tiny watch in her belt as impatiently as if she were sweet sixteen, instead of fair and forty.

"And here he is," said he, stepping in at the moment.

"I have come for your answer, Mrs. Sherwood. You know you arrived just in time to help me out of an embarrassing dilemma. The cards are all out for a wedding—shall there be one—or must there be cake baked to no purpose? Dinah will be in despair, and everybody disappointed. I, for one, shall go wild with disappointment."

"It seems a strange exchange," murmured the blushing widow, looking at her lovely daughter.

"But appropriate, I am convinced," continued the gentleman.

"Oh, mamma, do not refuse. You expect to consent sometime, and the sooner the better. It will be so charming! We will surprise every one! I will not even confide it to Mrs. Dennison. No one will know who the bride really is to be, until we take our places upon the floor. I will wear my dress, and be your bride-maid. Oh! I think it will be very charming!" Hugh looked at her radiant countenance; he had not seen her so much like her own self since he had refused to her the relation of father; he realized more vividly than ever what a foolish thing he would have done to have shadowed and chilled that sunny brightness.

"If it's jealousy of your daughter which causes you to let i

tate, I assure you that I have had no intention of marrying her?" Here both the ladies showed their surprise in their expression. "But let me sit here, on this sofa, where I can talk at ease, and I'll tell you all about it. I was just on the point of explaining myself to this little girl here, when you come to the rescue, my dear lady. You must know that I overheard a certain dark-lieué I am magnificently-heroic interview between two good-looking young people, who mutually avowed their willingness to break their own hearts, and their firm determination to secure the happiness of a certain selfish child, at the price of all their hopes, wishes, and peace of mind generally."

"Why, Mr. Fiddling?" murmured the youngest listener. "Nothing would I permit such suicidal proceedings, and being moved by the degree of devotion shown for the wretched child, I secretly interested myself in their case. The youth was about to fly the country, but I detained him by means of a contract which I held between us, thinking that when the time had come to sacrifice the eyre who—"

"Now, father, I won't hear to such slander," again interrupted the young girl, and he felt a soft hand upon either cheek, which impeded the progress of his narrative.

"Well, I will tell them all fidelity, that I should be all the more carrying out my little plot, which was nothing less romantic than to lead the mourning bride back to the priest, only to let his god-father, and give her away to the most likely youth, suddenly snatched from the slough of hell to the most unexpected happiness!"

"I hope not!" again interposed the wondering voice.

"I do not know, that there was a touch of the dramatic in my life; but I could not bear for my own love, and I could not bear to sit and wait silent in droning it out, when, suddenly, I was called to an audience in a dead silence. However, my poor plot was all disarranged by the flight of the principal actors, and I was in a dire state of alarm and perplexity, when your hospitality appeared upon the scene. I was actually afraid that I should have to marry the little minx myself, to keep the bride-cake from being a total loss!"

"What a fool you are, Mr. Fiddling! If John only knew it," muttered Myrtle to herself, in a whisper.

"What did you say, my child?"

"Oh, nothing, pap. I was just thinking—

"What a pity it was that John had run away. It is a pity, indeed. We might have two weddings in one, and save time, trouble, and expense, you know."

"What is the name of this future son-in-law of mine?" asked Mrs. Sherwood, with a smile.

"John Jones, Jr." answered Mr. Fielding. "A beautiful name," he added, maliciously, "very aristocratic, and to a romantic young girl, I should think it would be enough of itself. Some of his relatives are fashionable people. That was his aunt I introduced to you, in the cabin, Mrs. Sherwood."

"What's in a name?" asked Myrtle, with a flushing cheek. "I'd marry a man, if I loved him, if his name was Nebuchadnezzar. And as for his aunt, she's as warm-hearted and excellent a woman as there is in the world. She'd be much truer to me in sickness or misfortune than any of those 'fashionable relatives' would. John is poor now, dear mother, but he will soon be independent, if not rich, with his genius—for he has genius, mamma—and I love him, which is enough. There's nothin' shall ever induce a young girl to marry except love—"

"Or duty," interposed Mr. Fielding.

"I don't know," answered Myrtle, "I may have carried my sense of duty too far—I think now I did. No matter—I know you will love John, and be proud of him, mamma."

"I don't doubt it, my darling. I wish he were here this evening. I shall be the last person to oppose you upon grounds of riches or policy. It was that part, played by a parent, which blighted my life," she sighed, and looked away sadly, as at a dreary pit which she saw in space before her.

"Do not talk of blight," said Hugh; "your life shall blossom again. We will forget that we are not as young as Myrtle and John. We will think it is in frolic only that we call them our children—as little girls do their dolls," she said I—"and now, I take it for granted, that I have your consent to have the arrangements proceed."

Mrs. Dennis was surprised at the excessive lightness of spirits of her fair charge the day preceding the wedding. Brides elect are usually thoughtful, if not positively mel-

anxiously at the near approach of so important an event; but Myrtle was like a thistle-down, dancing upon a summer breeze. No one was made acquainted with the fact that the lady of the house was her mother; Mrs. Sherwood passed for an intimate friend of Mr. Fielding's, who had been invited to the coming festival.

At last the important evening arrived; gay parties went from Wakewalka on to the brilliantly-illuminated new mansion where the ceremony was to be performed. The large parlors were thronged; curiosity and interest were at the height; the small buzz and chatter which precedes the entrance of the bridegroom took place. To Mrs. Dennison was assigned the honor of receiving the guests—a situation she was eminently qualified to fill gracefully. That lady herself was not entirely secure in her task. She was too keen an observer not to perceive something mysterious was hovering about. When she had stepped into Myrtle's dressing-room to herself put the finishing touches to her toilet, the young girl had playfully refused to have her vail put on.

"Wait until the last moment," she said; "Mrs. Sherwood will arrange it for me, if I wish it."

Mrs. Dennison cast a jealous look at that lady, and retired. It was no wonder that she felt hurt to find herself supplanted by this strange woman, a stranger to the care of her pupil. But still the lady was at her own ease, and much comforted; she would have called to her self that Mrs. Sherwood was a good woman, as she saw her that evening, flitting about Myrtle's room, her hair and dress. She wore, the strange lady, a dark-colored dress, simple, without any ornament, and her hair bound back, fastened with a gold comb, and a single rose in it. A flush, as soft and full as a rose-petal, lay on her cheek, and her eyes were brilliant and tender.

"You, poor lady tonight, mother?" whispered Myrtle.

"What do you say? That which did not fill the young girl's heart with the desire of her own lover, whom she meant to wed with her as an emblem, she finding him less than her master. In this place she was obliged to accept a present of a man of the village, amiable and graceful enough, and only half perfect because he was not John Jones,

When the bridal-party came into the thronged parlors, and silence fell upon the assembly, surprise was the one emotion with which the guests beheld Hugh Fielding taking as his wife that strange lady by his side, unknown to every one of them, and Myrtle playing the part of bride-maid.

One person there was in that throng with whom surprise was also infinite joy. Standing out upon the portico, too sad to enter, not wishing to be seen, yet unable to stay away, lingered John Jones, who had returned to the scenes of his disappointment upon the day set to seal his unhappiness, thinking that he would steal one secret glance at the bride, in her beauty, then retreat to darkness and solitude, without disturbing her serenity by a sight of his wretchedness.

But as this meaning change in the programme dawned upon him, he lingered in a dream of joy, doubting his senses, obstructing further through the window into the room.

"Law suz?" exclaimed Mrs. Jones, who had made her way forward to congratulate "the happy pair," and to express her wonder at the turn events had taken; "if there ain't John a peeking in the window!"

"You don't say so! nothing could be more fortunate! run, child, and get your veil," exclaimed Mr. Fielding.

The blushing youth was dragged in by the exultant bride-groom, regardless of traveling attire, or stammered excuses; Myrtle's timid refusals were set at naught.

"This night, or never, his bride thou shalt be!" cried Hugh. Some one brought the bridal veil and orange wreath from the chamber; the young pair stood up, and before they could realize their own delicious, unexpected happiness, they were receiving congratulations as Mr. and Mrs. John Jones.

Now any thing further be said of all the world of conjecture and romantic gossip which floated about that evening? That doable wedding is still fresh in the memory of the guests, and the history of the beautiful Child of the Prairie is cherished among the annals of the city of Wakwaka.

This most powerful Romance of the Trail was to have issued May 15th, but
has been reluctantly detained for issue till June 1st.

Beadle's Dime Novels, No. 24,

TO ISSUE SATURDAY, JUNE 1st.

WILL COMPRIZE

THE TRAIL HUNTERS;

OR,

MONOWANO, THE SHAWNEE SPY.

BY EDWARD S. ELLIS.

Author of "SETH JONES," "MILL EDDON," "THE FRONTIER ANGEL," &c.

A story of the "Dark and Bloody Ground" (Kentucky) which will command more attention than the author's previous works — it deals with a subject as dramatical as in this country either in the "Trail Hunters" or those immortal men, Dick Douglas and Peter Jenkins, who figure so conspicuously in the "Frontier Angel." They are here exposed, and play most important parts in a most stirring drama. The Shawnee Spy is a man of clear up, and his love for the beautiful ward of Major Marston forms one of the most popular episodes in the history of the "Old West." This novel will be bold, strong, in all its efforts, and, while its story of mystery and love adds to its interest.

All the scenes described in the "Frontier Angel" will be repeated in "The Trail Hunters," adding climax to that fine story.

SEE BY-EDWARD S. ELLIS.

BEADLE AND COMPANY, Publishers,

141 William Street, New York

"Incomparable in Merit."

"Unapproachable in Price."

BEADLE'S DIME BOOKS, FOR THE MILLION!

BEADLE'S DIME SCHOOL MELODIST,
BEADLE'S DIME LETTER-WRITER,
BEADLE'S DIME COOK-BOOK,
BEADLE'S DIME RECIPE-BOOK,
BEADLE'S DIME SPEAKER, Nos. 1 & 2.
BEADLE'S DIME DIALOGUES, Nos 1 & 2.
BEADLE'S DIME BOOK OF FUN, 1 & 2.
BEADLE'S DIME MILITARY SONG BOOK.

BEADLE'S DIME FAMILY PHYSICIAN.

BEADLE'S DIME BOOK OF ETIQUETTE,
BEADLE'S DIME DRESS-MAKER,
BEADLE'S DIME MELODIST,
BEADLE'S DIME BOOK OF DREAMS,
BEADLE'S DIME CHESS INSTRUCTOR,
BEADLE'S DIME BOOK OF CRICKET,
BEADLE'S DIME BASE-BALL PLAYER,
BEADLE'S DIME GUIDE TO SWIMMING

Beadle's Dime Song Books, No's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7.

BEADLE'S DIME NOVELS.

EACH ISSUE 128 PAGES COMPLETE. TEN CENTS.

By Mrs. Ann S. Stephens.

MALAESKA: THE INDIAN WIFE OF
THE WHITE HUNTER.
MYRA: THE CHILD OF ADOPTION.
SYBIL CHASE; OR, THE VALLEY
RANCHE.

By Mrs. M. V. Victor.

ALICE WILDE: THE RAFTSMAN'S
DAUGHTER.
THE BACKWOODS' BRIDE: A Ro-
MANCE OF SQUATTER LIFE.
UNCLE EZEKIEL: AND HIS EXPLOITS
ON TWO CONTINENTS.
THE EMERALD NECKLACE; OR,
MRS. BUTTERBY'S BOARDER.

By Mrs. M. A. Denison.

CHIP: THE CAVE-CHILD.
THE PRISONER OF LA VINT-
RESSE; OR, THE FORTUNES OF A
CUBAN HEIRESS.
FLORIDA; OR, THE IRON WILL.

By Harry Cavendish, Esq.

THE PRIVATEER'S CRUISE, AND
THE BRIDE OF POMFRET HALL.
THE REEFER OF '76; OR, THE
CRUISE OF THE FIRE-FLY.

By Edward S. Ellis, Esq.

THE FRONTIER AND BORDER STORIES.
SETH JONES; OR, THE CAPTIVES OF
THE FRONTIER.
BILL BIDDON, TRAPPER; OR, LIFE
IN THE NORTHWEST.
THE FRONTIER ANGEL: A ROMANCE
OF KENTUCKY RANGERS' LIFE.
NATHAN TODD; OR, THE FATE OF
THE SIOUX' CAPTIVE.
THE TRAIL HUNTERS; OR, MONO-
WANO, THE SHAWNEE SPY.

By Various Authors.

THE SLAVE SCULPTOR; OR, THE
PROPHETESS OF THE SECRET CHAMBERS
THE GOLDEN BELT; OR, THE CA-
RIB'S PLEDGE.
CEDAR SWAMP; OR, WILD NAT'S
BRIGADE.
MADGE WYLDE; OR, THE
SHADOWS OF ORPHAN LIFE
MASSASOIT'S DAUGHTER
FRENCH CAPTIVES.
THE MAID OF E-SOPU
TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF
LUTION.

A Glorious Story of the "Lone Star" State!

Beadle's Dime Novels, No. 32

TO ISSUE SATURDAY, NOV. 30th,

WILL COMPRIZE

I R O N A ;

OR,

Life in the South-West Border.

BY EDWARD S. ELLIS.

Author of "SETH JONES," "BILL BIDDON," "TRAIL HUNTERS," "FOREST SPY," etc.

The author of the above justly celebrated stories, has here entered a new though congenial field of character and adventure. He has introduced persons and incidents quite equal in novelty and unique interest to anything which has fallen from his pen. *Woman* enters more into the thread of the story than in any of his previous works — a very beautiful and interesting character; but there is, in all the work, such a delineation of Life and Adventure in the Old South-West Border (of Texas) as will render "Irona" one of the most exciting and pleasing of all Mr. ELLIS' works. The introduction of the fabled swift white pacer of the prairies adds not a little to the romantic tissue of incidents which make up the delightful story.

FOR SALE BY ALL NEWS DEALERS.

BEADLE AND COMPANY, Publishers, 141 William St., N. Y.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the Year 1861,
by BEADLE AND COMPANY, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United
States for the Southern District of New York.

BEADLE'S DIME NOVELS.

EACH ISSUE 128 PAGES COMPLETE. TEN CENTS.

REVOLUTIONARY AND SEA STORIES.

BY HARRY CAVENDISH.

THE PRIVATEER'S CRUISE, AND THE BRIDE OF POMFRET HALL. A Sea Story of the Revolution.
THE REEFER OF '76; OR, THE CRUISE OF THE FIRE-FLY.

BY WM. R. EYSTER

CEDAR SWAMP; OR, WILD NAT'S BRIGADE. A Tale of the Palmetto State.
BY N. C. IRON.

THE MAID OF ESOPUS; OR, THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF THE REVOLUTION.
STELLA: THE DAUGHTER OF LIBERTY. A Tale of Terrorism in the War of '76.

BY A. J. H. DUGANNE.

MASSASOIT'S DAUGHTER; OR, THE FRENCH CAPTIVES. A Tale of Aboriginal New England.

THE PEON PRINCE: OR, THE YANKEE KNIGHT ERRANT IN MEXICO.

BY JOHN S. WARNER.

ISABEL DE CORDOVA; OR, THE BRETHREN OF THE COAST. A Romance of the Buccaneers.

FRONTIER AND BORDER STORIES.

BY EDWARD S. ELLIS.

SETH JONES; OR, THE CAPTIVES OF THE FRONTIER.
BILL BIDDON, TRAPPER; OR, LIFE IN THE NORTH-WEST.
THE FRONTIER ANGEL: A ROMANCE OF KENTUCKY RANGERS' LIFE.
NATHAN TODD; OR, THE FATE OF THE SIOUX' CAPTIVE.
THE TRAIL HUNTERS; OR, MONOWANO, THE SHAWNEE SPY.

BY MRS. M. V. VICTOR.

Alice Wilde: The Raftsmen's Daughter.

The Rackwoods' Bride: A Romance of Squatter Life.

Uncle Ezekiel: And His Exploits on Two Continents.

STORIES OF PASSION AND SENTIMENT.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter.

Myra: The Child of Adoption.

Sybil Chase; Or, The Valley Ranch.

BY MRS. M. A. DENISON.

Chip: The Cave-Child.

The Prisoner of La Vintresse; Or, Fortunes of an Heiress.

Florida; Or, The Iron Will.

BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

King Barnaby; Or, The Maidens of the Forest.

The Slave Sculptor; Or, The Prophetess of the Secret Chambers.

The Golden Belt; Or, The Carib's Pledge.

Nadge Wylde; Or, Lights and Shadows of Orphan Life.

Fred Winthrop: The Lady of Atherton Hall. A Prize Story.

Emerald Necklace; Or, Mrs. Butterby's Boarder.

"Incomparable in Merit."

"Unapproachable in Price."

BEADLE'S DIME BOOKS,

FOR THE MILLION!

BEADLE'S DIME SCHOOL MELODIST,
BEADLE'S DIME LETTER-WRITER,
BEADLE'S DIME COOK-BOOK,
BEADLE'S DIME RECIPE-BOOK,
BEADLE'S DIME SPEAKER, Nos. 1 & 2.
BEADLE'S DIME DIALOGUES, Nos 1 & 2
BEADLE'S DIME BOOK OF FUN, 1 & 2.
BEADLE'S DIME MILITARY SONG BOOK.

BEADLE'S DIME FAMILY PHYSICIAN.

BEADLE'S DIME BOOK OF ETIQUETTE,
BEADLE'S DIME DRESS-MAKER,
BEADLE'S DIME MELODIST,
BEADLE'S DIME BOOK OF DREAMS,
BEADLE'S DIME CHESS INSTRUCTOR,
BEADLE'S DIME BOOK OF CRICKET,
BEADLE'S DIME BASE-BALL PLAYER,
BEADLE'S DIME GUIDE TO SWIMMING

Beadle's Dime Song Books, No's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7.

BEADLE'S DIME DRILL-BOOK.

BEADLE'S DIME UNION SONG BOOK.

BEADLE'S DIME BIOGRAPHICAL LIBRARY

EACH ISSUE 100 PAGES COMPLETE. TEN CENTS.

Monthly issues, to comprise original, unique and authentic biographies of the most celebrated characters of modern times, prepared with great care by some of our best known and ablest writers, and especially designed to appeal to the hearts and homes of the American people.

No. 1.—GARIBALDI: The Washington of Italy.

No. 2.—DANIEL BOONE: The Hunter of Kentucky.

No. 3.—KIT CARSON: The Rocky Mountain Scout and Guide.

No. 4.—MAJOR-GENERAL ANTHONY WAYNE (MAD ASTHOSY) THE REVOLUTIONARY PATRIOT AND INDIAN CONQUEROR.

No. 5.—COL. DAVID CROCKETT: And His Adventures. The Celebrated Hunter, Wit and Patriot.

No. 6.—LIEUTENANT-GENERAL WINFIELD SCOTT: Commander-in-Chief U. S. A. With a full account of his Brilliant Victories in Mexico.

No. 7.—PONTIAC, THE CONSPIRATOR: CHIEF OF THE OTTAWAS. Together with a full account of the Celebrated Siege of Detroit.

No. 8.—MAJOR-GENERAL FREMONT: The AMERICAN PATHFINDER. With a full account of his Rocky Mountain Explorations and Adventures.

No. 9.—JOHN PAUL JONES: The REVOLUTIONARY NAVAL HERO.